Lao Zi

DAO DE JING



World Academic Classics

世界学术经典 · 英文版

老子 著

道德经

居延安 翻译 编注

上海译文出版社

Lao Zi

DAO DE JING

老子 著

道德经

居延安 翻译 编注

上海译文出版社



总策划／总主编

庄智象　林骧华



研发

编辑委员会

世界学术经典（英文版）
总　序

书之成为经典，乃人类在不同时代的思想、智慧与学术的结晶，优秀文化之积淀，具有不随时代变易的永恒价值。有道是读书须读经典，这是智者的共识。

对于中外经典著作中的思想表述，仅读外文书的中译本或文言著作的白话释文是不够的，尤其是当误译、误释发生的时候，读者容易被误导，或望文生义，或以讹传讹，使原有的文化差异变成更深的文化隔阂。因此，在“世界学术经典（英文版）”的选目中，大部分作品为英文原著；原作是其他语种的经典，则选用相对可靠的英文译本；至于中国古代经典，则采用汉英对照的方式呈现，旨在向西方阐释中国的思想和文化。其中，精选的中国经典是整个系列的重要组成部分。有了这一部分的经典，才真正体现出“世界性”。

以原典和英文方式出版，是为了使读者通过研读，准确理解以英文表达的思想、理论和方法，力求避免舛误，进而通过批判和接受，化为智慧力量。这有利于思想的传播，裨益于新思想的产生，同时亦可提高英语修养。

经典名著的重要性是不言而喻的，但是以下几点意义值得一再重申。

（一）学术经典提供思想源泉

两千六百年来的世界学术经典凝聚了人类思想的精华，世世代代的优秀思想家以他们独特的见识和智慧，留给后人取之不竭、用之不尽的思想源泉。从老子、孔子、柏拉图、亚里士多德以降，天才辈出，思想闪光，精彩纷呈。思想界的大师、名家们在人类思想史传统链条上的每一个环节，都启发后人开拓新的思想领域，探究生命的本质，直抵人性的深层。随着人类思想的不断成熟和完善，各个学科领域的理论从本体论、认识论、方法论、实践论、价值论等维度不断深化。后人继承前人的思想，借经典的滋养保持思想活力，丰富和发展前人的观点，使之形成一波又一波的思想洪流，从而改变人的思想和世界观，改变人类社会的进程。历史已经证明：人类社会的进步，思想的力量大于一切。

（二）学术经典传承精神力量

经典名著中蕴含的人类精神，传承的人类守望的共同价值原则和社会理想，在每一个具体领域里都有诸多丰富的表述，它们从整体上构成了推动人类进步的精神力量。研习和传承人类两千六百多年来的优秀思想，并将它化作求新求变的灵感，是人类文明的要义所在。仅有技术进步，还不足以表明人类的文明程度。若无优秀的思想底蕴，人类存在的意义将大打折扣。

中国思想传统中的基本理念和西方思想传统中的基本理念分别形成了东西方两大具有普遍价值的道德观念和价值系统。值得注意的是：（1）这两大道德系统应该是一个互补、互鉴的整体，两

者都不可偏废，因为人类的思想是个多元整体。任何一个民族，缺少其中之一，在精神上都可能是不完整的；(2) 这些基本理念都不是抽象概念，它们都具有很强的实践意义，并且必须由实践来考察，否则就很难体现其价值。

精神传承必然是一种自觉的过程，它靠习得，不靠遗传，因此我们需要研读经典。

(三) 学术经典构成文化积淀

“文化”包含三大部分：(1) 思想与精神现象；(2) 制度与习俗；(3) 有形的事物。学术经典是对思想与精神现象的归纳和提炼，对制度与习俗的探究和设计，对有形事物的形而上思考和描述。

每一个学科领域的经典著作中都会提出一些根本性的问题，这些问题直面人的困惑，思考人类社会的疑难，在新思想和新知识中展现人类的智慧。当这些思想成果积淀下来，就构成人类文化的主要组成部分。文化不只是制度或器物的外在形式，更重要的是凝结在其背后的精神与思想。

每一个学科的学术本身都要面对一些形而上的（超越性的、纯理论性的）文化问题。在很多人看来，理性的思考和理论的表述都是很枯燥的，但是热爱真理并且对思想情有独钟的人会从学术经典的理论中发现无限生动的天地，从而产生获得真理的快乐，这才是我们追求的真正文化。

大量阅读经典名著是一种学习、积累文化的根本方法，深度阅读和深刻记忆能使文化积淀在人的身上，并且代代相传。假如

这一过程中断了，人世间只剩下花天酒地、歌舞升平，文化也就湮灭了。

（四）学术经典推动社会进步

毫无疑问，凡属学术经典，都必须含有新的学术成果——新思想、新理论、新方法，或者新探索。这样的原创性学术成果越多，人类的思想就越深邃，视野越开阔，理论更全面、完美，方法更先进、有效，社会的进步才能获得新的动力和保障。

人文主义推翻神学，理性主义旨在纠正人的偏激，启蒙精神主张打破思想束缚，多元主义反抗绝对理念。各种新思想层出不穷，带来了学术的进步，启发并推动了更大的社会变革。这些原创思想在历史长河中经过漫长的时间考验，成为经典，在任何一种文明中都是社会进步和发展的动力。

当我们研读完一部学术经典，分析和归纳其原创的思想观点时，可以很清晰地理解和感悟它在同时代的环境里对于社会的变革和进步有着何种意义，以及它对当下有哪些启迪。

相比技术的发展，思想并不浮显在社会的表层，它呈现在书本的字里行间，渗透于人的心智，在人的灵魂中闪光。每当社会需要时，它能让我们看到无形的巨大力量。

温故而知新。今日世界纷乱依旧，但时代已不再朦胧。人类思想史上的各种主张，在实践中都已呈现清晰的面貌。当我们重新梳理各种思想和理论时，自然不会再返回到“全盘接受”或者“全盘否定”的幼稚阶段。二十一世纪人类正确的世界观、人生

观、价值观需要优秀思想传统的支撑，并通过批判继承，不断推陈出新，滋衍出磅礴之推力。

我们所选的这些学术经典，成书于不同的时代，代表了不同的思想与理论主张。有些著作带有时代烙印，有其局限性或片面性；有些观点不一定正确，但从另一个方面显示出人类思想的丰富性和复杂性。各门学科建立、各种主张提出之后，都曾经在历代思想的实验场上经受碰撞和检验，被接受或者被批判。我们的学者需要研读这些书，而青年学生们的思想成长更需要读这些书。当然，批评与分析是最有效和最有益的阅读方法。

有鉴于此，我们希望“世界学术经典（英文版）”能够真正做到“开卷有益”，使我们自己在潜移默化中都成长为有思想、有理想、有品位的人。

上海时代教育出版研究中心

2018 年 10 月

目 录

INTRODUCTION

The Text

Dao De Jing,[1] one of the two top Chinese classic texts, was first introduced to the West in the early 19th century. The five-thousand-character text, though titled differently ever since its birth some twenty five hundred years ago, is more popularly called 道德经 in Chinese. The first character 道 means way or road; the second 德 refers to virtue or inner strength; the third 经 stands for scripture or canon. Therefore *Dao De Jing* can also be translated as *The Book of the Way and Virtue.*

Lao Zi, author of *Dao De Jing,* and Confucius, author of the other top Chinese classic *The Analects*, were both philosophers distinguished for talking in aphorisms. Confucian philosophy is one of social order dealing with human relationships. Lin Yutang, an eminent Chinese scholar, wrote in 1948, "Confucians worship culture and reason; Taoists (Daoists) reject them in favor of nature and intuition." Lao Zi was a mystic, taking an interest in the mystery and beauty of the universe, the meaning of life and death, the quaking of the inner soul and the realm of forces unseen.[2] *Dao De Jing* is the foundational text of the Daoist School of thought. It has also been central in Chinese

1. Translated by Western scholars as *Tao Te Ching* following the Wade-Giles system.
2. Lin Yutang (tr, & ed.), *The Wisdom of Laotse*. New York: The Modern Library, 1948, pp.4–5.

Buddhism which, when first introduced into China from India, was largely interpreted through the use of Daoist terms and concepts. Many Chinese artists, poets and essayists have used *Dao De Jing* as a source of inspiration.

The philosophy expounded in *Dao De Jing* became popular during the early period of the Han Dynasty. It was credited with calming the country and its people after the turmoil of the Warring States, the harsh policies of the First Emperor of Qin, and the ensuing civil war. Hundreds of years later, the Daoists adopted *Dao De Jing* as their religion's canon and honored Lao Zi as the founder of that religion. But it was not until the Tang Dynasty that the name of Lao Zi started to receive the highest honors.

Dao De Jing, one of the shortest of all Chinese classics, is divided into two sections: *The Dao Jing* (Book I - Parts 1–37) and *The De Jing* (Book II - Parts 38–81). The classic has seen a complex and controversial textual history for the two and a half millennia since it was known to exist. Adding to the complexity and controversy were the discoveries of new bamboo, silk, and paper manuscripts in the 20th century. Of particular significance was the discovery in 1973 of the so-called Mawangdui silk texts, which were found in a tomb in Mawangdui, China and dated from 168 BCE. These texts, referred to as Text A and Text B, reverse the ordering of the two parts with *The De Jing* coming before *The Dao Jing*. The oldest known version of this text was found in 1993 in the town of Guodian, China's Hubei Province. The text was written on bamboo tablets determined to date prior to 300 BEC. This Guodian text corresponds with the ordering of the authentic texts of *Dao De Jing*.

The everlasting controversy and complexity of the book's textual history, coupled with new archeological discoveries of authentic versions, has served to encourage many scholars and translators to continuously rework their "revised editions." Unofficial statistics puts the total number of known revised editions, in Chinese alone, at

over 700. However, the co-existence of the large number of different revised editions has not diminished the authenticity and integrity of this Chinese classic. The general theme and the main content has consistently remained the same. The original text of *Dao De Jing*, like other ancient texts written in classical Chinese, had no punctuation marks. Each scholar or translator has taken the liberty to punctuate the text, as they believed Lao Zi would have done. As a result, each translation bears subtle differences in its interpretation of the meaning of a term, a sentence, or a whole paragraph, making each revised edition stand on its own.

It is essential to understand that the original teachings of Lao Zi's *Dao De Jing* were written in classical Chinese. This presents a great challenge to even well-versed contemporary scholars, let alone average Chinese readers, when they are attempting to decipher the original texts. It is therefore necessary for all translations to occur on two levels. Firstly, the original classical Chinese text needs to be translated into a modern Chinese version. Secondly, this modern Chinese version has to be translated into a version of contemporary English or any other foreign language. Naturally, each translator must also possess an intimate knowledge of the historical as well as the linguistic context within which it was written.

This current Harvard Square version is the one that is based on the 1991 edition published by Shanghai Chinese Classics Publishing House. Feng Dafu, a Chinese classic textual scholar, not only translated the text from classical Chinese into modern Chinese, but also revised the text with his own edits. He claimed that he based his revision and translation on twenty-six earlier revised editions of *Dao De Jing* including some of the most important versions (the Wang Bi version, the Heshang Gong version, and the Yan Zun version) known in China. He was also able to refer to both Text A and Text B of the Mawangdui texts discovered in 1973.

A newer English version can hardly be better or worse, and no one

can logically claim that his or hers is the best translation; there have been too many revised versions in Chinese alone, and each has its own uniqueness and authenticity. This newer version, however, is newer in terms of the revised content, the punctuation, the style of language, the readability, and selective explanatory footniotes. This translator encourages the reader to pause frequently when reading this version of *Dao De Jing* or any other version, and take a moment to reflect beyond the words of each passage. Only then will the essence and true meaning of Lao Zi's original text become clear.

The Author

It is intriguing that not only has the text of *Dao De Jing* always been controversial, but also the details about the author of the classic remain questionable to this day.

To begin with, no one can say for sure what Lao Zi's true family name was, though it is generally accepted that he was called Li Er (李 耳) or Lao Dan (老 聃). People also agree that he was born in the state of Chu during the Zhou Dynasty some 500 years prior to Christ, but the date of his birth remains in question. It is also accepted that Lao Zi was a record-keeper in the Zhou court. Legend has it that Confucius once consulted him on matters of rites and ceremonies. So it was long assumed among scholars that Lao Zi was born earlier than Confucius though some modern scholarship places him living centuries later or even questions if he ever existed at all.

It is unclear when Lao Zi left his record-keeping post but there is folklore that he later traveled westward riding an ox. One day he came to the Hangu Pass, then Zhou Dynasty's westernmost outpost. The guardian of the outpost had heard of Lao Zi and his westward journey. After paying the master the respect he deserved, the guardian asked Lao Zi to leave behind some of his wisdom in written form. Lao Zi agreed and wrote the 5000-character essay titled *Dao De Jing*. After he

finished the essay, Lao Zi continued his westward journey and was not heard from again.

In the later years of the Han Dynasty, bloodline and ranked clans became a mindset in imperial China spreading from the common people all the way up to the emperor. Everyone desired to either have or be associated with a good family name. At one point clan membership was the primary requirement for high-ranking positions in government. The higher attributes of one's capability and knowledge were secondary, if considered at all. The royal Li family of the Tang Dynasty, conscientious about its somewhat mixed bloodline, now claimed direct linkage with Lao Zi (whose family name was believed by many to be Li). Thus Daoism became the national religion during the Tang Dynasty, the most prosperous dynasty in Chinese history, and Lao Zi, or rather, the name of Lao Zi, received the highest honor ever.

This ancient text, like many other ancient Chinese classics, had no chapter headings. The translator crafted all the titles of the eighty-one pieces of prose of the text. Some title headings are believed to match nicely with the content, some echo the theme, and some would probably need improvement. Also, the paragraphing of each piece was solely the translator's choice, with a view to enhancing the flow of thought. If there is any mistake or discrepancy, it's solely his responsibility.

As mentioned earlier, the original *Dao De Jing* in Chinese had no punctuation marks. The punctuation marks used in this English version were also the work of the translator, which may or may not correspond with the punctuation marks used in the Chinese version published in 1991 by the Shanghai Chinese Classics Publishing House, upon which the translation of this work was based.

To ensure smooth reading of the whole text, footnotes have been controlled to the minimum, offering no interpretation or explanation unless determined absolutely necessary.

Book I

道经

The Dao Jing

一章

道，可道，非常道；名，可名，非常名。无，名万物之始；有，名万物之母。故常无，欲以观其妙；常有，欲以观其徼[1]。此两者，同出而异名，同谓之玄。玄之又玄，众妙之门。

1. 徼：音【jiào】，边界。

1 The Dao, the Way

The Dao[1], if it can be told[2], will not be the eternal Dao. The name, if it can be named[3], will not be the eternal name. The nothingness is where Heaven and Earth originated, and the existence, Mother of all things and creatures. The eternal nothingness is where one explores the mysteries of the world, and the eternal existence is where one observes its limits. Nothingness and existence, though named differently, share the same origin, which remains mysterious. It is from the mysterious nothingness to the mysterious existence that one finds the door to the secrets and miracles of the world.

---

1. The Dao, or 道 in Chinese, means the "way," "method," or "law."
2. Could read "if it can be told in its totality."
3. Could read "if it can be named in its entirety."

二章

天下皆知美之为美，斯恶已；皆知善之为善，斯不善已。故有无相生，难易相成，长短相形，高下相倾，音声相和，先后相随。是以圣人处无为之事，行不言之教。万物作焉而不为始，生而不有，为而不恃[1]，功成而弗居。夫唯弗居，是以不去。

1. 恃：音【shì】，依仗。

2 Beauty Versus Ugliness

All people see beauty in what is beautiful, and that's how ugliness is defined. All people see virtue in virtuous deeds, and that's how evil is exposed. Therefore, existence and nothingness produce each other; difficult contrasts with easy; long is compared with short; high is relative to low; sound and voice together make harmony; front and back go one after the other. And that's why the sage does things by not doing them, and teaches people using no words to teach. He lets all things and creatures act in their own natural way instead of forcing them to act. He creates, but claims no ownership; he serves, but attaches no conditions; he accomplishes, but takes no credit. Only because he takes no credit for his successes, does the credit endure.

三章

不尚贤，使民不争；不贵难得之货，使民不盗；不见可欲，使民不乱。是以圣人之治：虚其心，实其腹，弱其志，强其骨。常使民无知无欲，使夫智者不敢为也。为无为，则无不治。

3 Act Without Acting

Not promoting talents prevents people from competing against each other. Not valuing things that are rare and hard to get stops people from stealing. Not showing that which induces desires keeps people from disrupting social order. And that's how the sage finds the way of governing: Simplify people's minds, fill up their stomachs, weaken their wills, and strengthen their physical frames. That way, people will have no knowledge or ambitions, and the clever ones will not dare to act. Act without acting, and there will be no place that cannot be governed.

四章

道冲，而用之或不盈。渊兮，似万物之宗。湛兮，似或存。吾不知谁之子，象帝之先。

4 Does the Dao Predate Heaven?

The Dao is such a huge vessel that it can never be filled up. Truly deep, it is like the origin of all things and creatures in the universe. Though invisible, it seems to exist. I don't know whose offspring it might be. It could have predated Heaven.

五章

天地不仁，以万物为刍狗[1]；圣人不仁，以百姓为刍狗。天地之间，其犹橐籥[2]乎！虚而不屈，动而愈出。多闻数[3]穷[4]，不如守中[5]。

1. 刍：音【chú】，草；刍狗：草狗，以草扎成，用以祭祀，用后便随风飘走，意为世上万物，自然而生，自然而灭。
2. 橐籥：风箱；橐：音【tuó】，两边都开口的袋子；籥：音【yuè】，送风管。
3. 数：技数。
4. 穷：穷尽。
5. 冯达甫 1991 年版《老子译注》中为“冲”字，此处改为《老子》其他版本用的“中”。

5 Hold the Middle

Nature behaves as if it's indifferent; it treats all things and creatures like straw-dogs[1]. The sage behaves as if he's indifferent; he treats all people like straw-dogs[2]. What a great bellows it is between Heaven and Earth! It is empty, and yet it will not exhaust its supply. The more force one exerts, the more it supplies. Hearing too much will leave you with no strategies or tactics; it's better to hold the middle.

---

1. In ancient China, straw-dogs were made and used as sacrificial offerings. Lao Zi was saying that nature lets all things and creatures live their natural lives and die their natural deaths.
2. Lao Zi was saying that the sage lets the people live their own life their natural way.

六章

谷神不死，是谓玄牝[1]。玄牝之门，是谓天地根。绵绵若存，用之不勤。

1. 牝：音【pìn】，雌性、女性、母性。

6 The Valley Spirit

The spirit of the valley never dies, which informs the mysterious femininity. At the door of this mysterious femininity lies the very root of Heaven and Earth. Continuously flows the valley, confirming life's eternity.

七章

天长地久。天地所以能长且久者，以其不自生，故能长生。是以圣人后其身而身先，外其身而身存。非以其无私邪？故能成其私。

7 Why Heaven & Earth Exist

Heaven and Earth are everlasting. Heaven and Earth last forever because they do not exist for their own purposes. So they live forever. The sage places himself behind others, so he can stay ahead of others. He thinks about others' interests, so his own interests are taken care of. Is it not his selflessness that works to realize his self-interests?

八章

上善若水，水善利万物而不争，处众人之所恶，故几于道。居善地，心善渊，与善仁，言善信，政善治，事善能，动善时。夫唯不争，故无尤。

8 The Highest Good

The highest good is like water. Water is good at benefiting all things and creatures; it never competes to have a higher hand. Water flows to lower places that people disdain. So water knows what the Dao truly is. People with the goodness of water are good at finding lower places, keeping their heart calm, being kind to others, using truthful words, governing well as a leader, managing things effectively, and taking action when it's time to act. Only because they don't compete to have an upper hand, do they not grudge.

九章

持而盈之，不如其已；揣[1]而锐[2]之，不可长保。金玉满堂，莫之能守；富贵而骄，自遗其咎。功遂身退，天之道哉！

---

1. 揣：可读为“锤”，锤击之意。
2. 锐：使锋利。

9 When to Recede

When you have what you need to have and still want more, it's better to put the excess down. When you have made your tool too sharp, it won't last long. When you fill a house with gold and jade, you can't keep it safe. When you have reaped riches and honors, and now act arrogantly, you are sowing the seeds of disaster. When you have achieved your success, you had better recede: the Dao's way.

十章

营魄抱一，能无离乎？专气致柔，能婴儿乎？涤除玄鉴，能无疵乎？爱民治国，能无为乎？天门开阖[1]，能为雌乎？明白四达，能无知乎？生之畜之，生而不有，为而不恃，长而不宰：是谓玄德。

---

1. 阖：音【hé】，关闭。

10 Mind and Body as One

Make sure that your mind and body be one, but can they have no separation? Make the flow of your vital energy soft and natural, but can it be as soft and natural as a baby's? Clear up your mind, but can it become totally flawless? Can the sage act by not acting when it comes to caring for people and governing a state? Can he retain femininity when all his senses are exposed? To remain clear and enlightened, can he not use his intellect? He creates and nurtures. He creates, but claims no ownership; serves, but attaches no conditions; and governs, but be no oppressor. These are called high virtues.

十一章

三十辐[1]共一毂[2]，当其无，有车之用。埏[3]埴[4]以为器，当其无，有器之用。凿户牖[5]以为室，当其无，有室之用。故有之以为利，无之以为用。

---

1. 辐：音【fú】，从轮子中心向各方伸展的条子，常称辐条。
2. 毂：音【gǔ】，车轮中心的圆木，有圆孔，可插轴。
3. 埏：揉和。
4. 埴：黏土。
5. 牖：音【yǒu】，窗户。

11 Usefulness Versus Ownership

Thirty spokes encircle a nave, but the usefulness of a wheel depends on the emptiness inside of the nave. A vessel is made of clay, but it only becomes useful when it is empty. We make doors and windows to build a house, but people can live there only when it is vacant. Therefore owning a thing creates convenience for its use, but the actual usefulness is when it's not used.

十二章

五色令人目盲，五音令人耳聋，五味令人口爽[1]，驰骋畋[2]猎令人心发狂，难得之货令人行妨[3]。是以圣人为腹不为目。故去彼取此。

1. 爽：伤败。
2. 畋：音【tián】，打猎。
3. 妨：害；行妨：做坏事。

12 Sensual Pleasures

The five colors blind a person's eyes. The five musical notes deafen a person's ears. The five flavors dull a person's tastes. Horseracing and hunting madden a person's mind. Rare treasures make a person do bad things. That is why the sage cares about his belly, not his eyes. And that is why he keeps one and rejects the other.

十三章

“宠辱若惊[1]，贵大患若身。”何谓“宠辱若惊”？宠为上，辱为下。得之若惊，失之若惊，是为“宠辱若惊”。何谓“贵大患若身”？吾所以有大患者，为吾有身；及吾无身，吾有何患！故贵，以身为天下，若可寄天下；爱，以身为天下，若可托天下。

1. 若：你；若惊：你惊，让你吃惊。

13 Fear Comes from Your Own Being

Both favor and humiliation can scare you. Value your greatest fear just as you value your own being. What does it mean to say "both favor and humiliation can scare you?" Favor means being uplifted, and humiliation means being downtrodden. Favor can scare you, so can losing it. That is what it means to say "both favor and humiliation can scare you." What does it mean to say "value your greatest fear just as you value your own being?" The reason that one can experience all fears is that one has his own being. What's there to fear when you don't exist! Therefore, to endear yourself is to dedicate all your being to the world, and then you will be entrusted with the world. To love is to dedicate your life to all others, and then all others will trust you.

十四章

视之不见名曰微，听之不闻名曰希，搢[1]之不得名曰夷[2]。此三者不可致诘，故混而为一。其上不皦[3]，其下不昧，绳绳[4]不可名，复归于无物。是谓无状之状，无象之象；是谓惚恍，迎之不见其首，随之不见其后。执古之道，以御今之有，能知古始，是谓道纪。

---

1. 搢：音【mín】，抚摸。
2. 夷：消灭、泯灭。
3. 皦：音【jiǎo】，洁白，光亮。
4. 绳绳：绵延不绝。

14 Mysterious, yet It's the Way

You try to look at it, and yet nothing you can see. This is called "formlessness." You try to listen to it, and yet nothing you can hear. This is called "soundlessness." You try to reach it, and yet nothing you can touch. This is called "shapelessness." These three forms of existence negate further inquiring, so let's mix them into one mass. Above the mass there is no light, nor is it dark below it. It is so elusive and undefinable that it is impossible to name. What is certain is that all things and creatures return to the original state of nothingness. This is called the form of formlessness and the shape of shapelessness. It is so fleeting and inconceivable that you greet it and yet you don't see its head, and you follow it and yet you don't see its back. Uphold the Dao of the past, and you can understand things now around you. If you understand the beginnings of the remote antiquity, you know the law of the Dao.

十五章

古之善为道者，微妙玄通，深不可识。夫唯不可识，故强为之容[1]。豫兮若冬涉川，犹兮若畏四邻，俨兮其若客，涣兮若冰之释，敦兮其若朴，混兮其若浊，旷兮其若谷。孰能浊以止，静之徐清？孰能安以久，动之徐生？保此道者不欲盈，夫唯不盈，故能敝而新成。

1. 容：描述。

15 Life Rebounds

Ancient masters of the Dao were so deep and profound that they were able to grasp the hidden secrets and mysteries of the world. It was because they were so deep and profound that a full revelation of their wisdom is hardly possible. They were so cautious as if to wade through a winter stream, and so alert as if the enemies were all around, and so dignified like a visiting guest, and so fluid like melting ice, and so unaffected like an uncarved block of wood, and so patient waiting for the mud to settle down and be clear again, and so open-hearted like a valley. Who can stand still waiting for the mud to settle down and gradually become clear? Who can remain quiet all along while life gets stirred and gradually reborn? Those who uphold the Dao refuse to be self-content. And only do they refuse to be self-content, life rebounds after having had its downfalls.

十六章

致虚极，守静笃，万物并作，吾以观其复。夫物芸芸，各复归其根。归根曰静，静曰复命。复命曰常，知常曰明。不知常，妄作，凶；知常，容。容乃公，公乃全，全乃天，天乃道，道乃久，没身不殆。

16 Empty Mind, Quiet Heart

Empty your mind completely, keep your heart in total quietude, watch all things and creatures grow on their own, and you would be in a good position to observe how they return to where they came from. All things and creatures in the world, as varied and complicated as they are, eventually return to their roots. The return to their roots is called quieting down, and that is what the cycle of life is. The cycling of life is an eternal law. Knowing this law is wisdom. Not knowing this law and acting on whims is playing with fire. Knowing this eternal law, you can be tolerant. Being tolerant, you can be impartial. Being impartial is the rule of Heaven. Following the rule of Heaven, you are one with the Dao, and will endure. You will then be free of disasters all your life.

十七章

太上，下知有之；其次，亲之誉之；其次，畏之；其次，侮之。信不足，焉[1]有不信。悠兮其贵言！功成事遂，百姓皆谓我自然。

---

1. 焉：于是。

17 A Wise Ruler

The wisest ruler is one that people know exists[1]. A less wise ruler is one that people want to get close to and praise. A still less wise ruler is one that people fear. The least wise ruler is one that people despise. When a ruler lacks sincerity, people will not trust him. A wise ruler will weigh carefully and value what he says. When people have had their work completed and made things happen the way they are supposed to happen, the wise ruler would let them say that they did it themselves, all on their own[2]!

---

1. That means that the ruler just lets people live their life their own way.
2. A wise ruler does not take credit for what he does for the people; he would let people take the credit.

十八章

大道废，焉[1]有仁义；智慧出，焉有大伪；六亲不和，焉有孝慈；国家昏乱，焉有忠臣。

1. 焉：本章出现四个“焉”字，均拟作“乃”、“则”、“于是”解。

18 Go and Talk with Confucius

When the Dao is discarded, there would then be benevolence and righteousness. When great wisdom is shown, there would then be the practice of great deception. When harmony is broken between father and son, older brother and younger brother, and husband and wife, there would then be the talk of filial sons and kind parents. When a country is thrown into chaos, there would then be loyal ministers around.

十九章

绝圣弃智，民利百倍；绝仁弃义，民复孝慈；绝巧弃利，盗贼无有。此三者，以为文，不足，故令有所属：见素抱朴，少私寡欲，绝学无忧[1]。

1. 此处的“学”是“教”的意思，“忧”乃是“优”。绝学无忧，应读为“绝教无优”。

19 Be Plain and Simple

Don't pretend to be a sage and don't be too clever, which would benefit people one hundred more times. Banish the talk of benevolence and righteousness[1], then there would reemerge filial sons and kind parents. Say no to excessive ingenuity and self-interests, then there would be no robbers or thieves. If these three advices were words only, that would not be enough. You must know what you need to do: Be plain and simple, control your desires and selfishness, and give up teaching and feeling superior.

1. Should read as "Banish the talk of benevolence and discard the talk of righteousness."

二十章

唯[1]之与阿[2]，相去几何？美之与恶，相去何若？人之所畏，不可不畏。荒兮其未央[3]哉！众人熙熙，如享太牢[4]，如登春台。我独泊兮其未兆，如婴儿之未孩，儽儽[5]兮若无所归。众人皆有余，而我独若遗。我愚人之心也哉！沌沌兮！众人昭昭，我独昏昏；众人察察，我独闷闷。澹[6]兮其若海，飂[7]兮若无止。众人皆有以，而我独顽似鄙。我独异于人，而贵食母[8]。

---

1. 唯：唯唯诺诺，“是”也。
2. 阿：可读作诃【hē】，大言而怒，怒起于所否，含有“否”的意思。
3. 未央：未尽，没有尽头。
4. 太牢：古用一牛一羊一猪的最隆重的祭奠仪式。此喻盛大宴席。
5. 儽儽：读【léiléi】，疲惫的样子。
6. 澹：音【dàn】，水波摇动的样子，恬静深湛。
7. 飂：音【liù】，西风。
8. 母：本性；食母：道也。

20 Mother Feeds

How far apart are a pleasing yes and an unpleasant no? What's the distance between good and evil? People who fear cannot but be feared. Who knows where in so vast a world fear can come from! All are so happy as if they were attending a grand feast or stepping onto a balcony to enjoy the view of spring. I alone stay where I am at, not knowing what lies ahead just like an infant having not yet learned how to smile. I am tired, feeling like having no home to return to. All others have so much to spare whereas I alone seem to have lost everything. I am so stupid, so very ignorant. All others are bright and enlightened but I alone am so very confused. All others are alert and probing but I alone am so very sluggish. Quietude is as deep as an ocean, and wind keeps blowing as if it wouldn't end. All others are accomplishing something whereas I alone am stubborn and useless. I just want to be different from all others; what I truly treasure is me being fed by Mother[1].

1. Lao Zi seemed to be describing, using his imaginations, how a sage was self-ridiculing. The word Mother here can read as a pun, referring to both a child's mother and the Dao.

二十一章

孔德之容，惟道是从。道之为物，惟恍惟惚。惚兮恍兮，其中有象；恍兮惚兮，其中有物。窈兮冥兮，其中有情。其情甚真，其中有信。自今及古，其名不去，以阅众甫[1]。吾何以知众甫之然哉？以此。

---

1. 甫：通“父”，开始。

21 The Dao Guides

The revealing of great virtue finds its only guidance from the Dao. The Dao, as it acts, is so fleeting, so alternating. Alternating and fleeting, there appear shapes in between; fleeting and alternating, there seem to be things around. It is so quiet and so very deep that there must lie feelings of life. Such feelings are real and latent with trust. From the ancient times till this day, the name of the Dao would always stay; it has been guiding us to know how all beings originated . How do I know the very origin of all things and creatures? It is through the Dao.

二十二章

曲则全，枉则直，洼则盈，敝则新，少则得，多则惑。是以圣人执一为天下牧。不自见，故明；不自是，故彰；不自伐，故有功；不自矜，故长。夫唯不争，故天下莫能与之争。古之所谓曲则全者，岂虚言哉？诚，全而归之。

22 Partial Is Complete

It is partial, therefore it is complete. It is crooked, therefore it is straight. It is empty, therefore it is full. It is used up, therefore it is new. It is less, therefore it is more. It is more, therefore it is confusing. That's why the sage holds the Dao, setting an example for the world to follow. He does not reveal himself, so he sees clearly. He does not assert himself, so he stands out. He does not brag about himself, so he succeeds. He is not arrogant, so he excels. He never competes against anybody, so no one on earth can compete against him. How could it be just some empty words that "it is partial, therefore it is complete" as said in the ancient times? Be true to yourself, and you would be you again in a complete sense.

二十三章

希言自然。故飘风不终朝，骤雨不终日。孰为此者？天地。天地尚不能久，而况于人乎！故从事于道者同于道，得者同于得，失者同于失。同于得者，道亦得之；同于失者，道亦失之。

23 Let Things Run Their Own Course

Say less, let things run their own course. A whirlwind can't blow for a whole morning. A rainstorm doesn't last for a whole day. Who brings the whirlwind and rainstorm? It is Heaven and Earth. If even Heaven and Earth can't make them last long, what can humans do? Therefore when you do things in accordance with the Dao, you will be one with the Dao. When you do things in accordance with virtue, you will be one with virtue. When you act to lose both, you will be one with the loss. When you are one with virtue, the Dao will be one with you. When you are one with the loss of it, the Dao will lose you.

二十四章

企者不立，跨者不行。自见者不明，自是者不彰，自伐者无功，自矜者不长。其在道也，曰余食赘形，物[1]或[2]恶之，故有道者不处。

1. 物：此处指"人"。
2. 或："必定"的意思。

24 Be Solid and Modest

He who stands on tiptoes can't stand firmly. He who takes big strides can't go far. He who shows himself can't see clearly. He who asserts himself can't stand out. He who brags about himself can't succeed. He who acts arrogantly can't excel. Looking from the Dao's perspective, these behaviors are like the leftovers of a meal or the excessive meat on a human body. People generally feel disgusted about them. Those who follow the Dao will do none of the above.

二十五章

有物混成，先天地生。寂兮寥兮，独立而不改，周行而不殆，可以为天地母。吾不知其名，字之曰道，强为之名曰大。大曰逝，逝曰远，远曰反。故道大，天大，地大，人亦大。域中有四大，而人居其一焉。人法地，地法天，天法道，道法自然。

25 The Dao Submits to Natural Law

There is something that can be conceived of as a whole, born before Heaven and Earth. Soundless and formless, it stands on its own and never changes. It never stops circulating in motion. It can be called Mother of Heaven and Earth. I don't know how to name it, so just call it Dao. If forced to name it differently, it can then be Great. Great means there is nowhere it can't go. To say there is nowhere it can't go means there is no place it can't reach. To say there is no place it can't reach means it will return to where it originates. So the Dao is great. Heaven is great. Earth is great. The people are also great. These are the four greats in the world, including the great people. Humans submit to Earth. Earth submits to Heaven. Heaven submits to the Dao. The Dao submits to Natural Law.

二十六章

重为轻根，静为躁君。是以君子终日行不离辎重；虽有荣观，燕处超然。奈何万乘之主而以身轻于天下？轻则失根，躁则失君。

26 Act Discreetly

Heaviness is the root of lightness. Quietude subdues impetuousness. So a gentleman would travel all day long without leaving his heavy supply cart behind. The view from the road might be splendidly beautiful, but he could sit quietly letting all things pass. How can the ruler of a big country act indiscreetly toward the people he rules? Indiscreetness is to lose the root, and impetuousness is to lose the control.

二十七章

善行无辙迹，善言无瑕[1]谪[2]，善数不用筹策，善闭无关楗[3]而不可开，善结无绳约而不可解。是以圣人常善救人，故无弃人；常善救物，故无弃物。是谓袭明。故善人者，善人之师；不善人者，善人之资。不贵其师，不爱其资，虽智大迷，是谓要妙。

1. 瑕：玉上的斑点。
2. 谪：音【zhé】，指责、责备。
3. 楗：读【jiàn】，门栓，横的叫“关”，竖的叫“楗”。

27 Value Your Teachers

He who is good at traveling leaves no traces behind. He who is good at speaking leaves no flawed words behind. He who is good at counting can count without using counters. He who is good at closing can shut the door up without using a bolt. He who is good at making knots can tie things together without using a rope. Therefore the sage is always good at helping people so no one is left with no help. He is always good at helping with things so nothing is left with no help. That is called unspoken intelligence. Good people are the teachers of good people. Not-so-good people are the resources of good people. If you do not value your teachers or treasure your resources, you will be at your total loss even if you are intelligent. This is a top secret of life.

二十八章

知其雄，守其雌，为天下溪；为天下溪，常德不离，复归于婴儿。知其白，守其黑，为天下式；为天下式，常德不忒，复归于无极。知其荣，守其辱，为天下谷；为天下谷，常德乃足，复归于朴。朴散则为器，圣人用之则为官长。故大制无割。

28 Great Governance

Know your masculine strength, preserve your feminine softness, and you will become the stream of all people. When you are the stream of all people, you will keep the Heaven-given character, and regain the natural innocence of an infant[1]. Know what is white, preserve what is black, and you will become a role model for the world. When you are a role model for the world, virtue will not be tarnished, and things will return to the Dao's original state of nothingness. Know the glory, preserve the insult, and you would become the valley of all people. When you are the valley of all people, virtue will be abundant, and things will return to their simple state like an uncarved block of wood. When an uncarved block of wood gets cut, it would become all kinds of utensils. The sage, however, would use the Dao to serve as head of officials. Great governance takes no cutting.

---

1. In Daoism, an infant signifies a state of existence that is innocent and natural.

二十九章

将欲取天下而为之，吾见其不得已。天下神器，不可为也，不可执也。为者败之，执者失之。故物或行或随，或嘘或吹，或强或羸，或载[1]或隳[2]。是以圣人去甚、去奢、去泰。

1. 载：乘车，含“安全”之意。
2. 隳：音【huī】，毁坏，含“危险”之意。

29 Don't Act Against the Dao

If anyone attempts to rule the world by acting on it, I suppose he will not succeed. This mysterious world under Heaven can't be acted on, nor can you hold it in your grasp. If you try to act on it, you will ruin it. If you try to hold it in your grasp, you will lose it. Things are all different in the world: Some lead and some follow; some are cold and some hot; some are strong and some weak; some are safe and some in danger. Therefore the sage shuns insatiable desires for carnal pleasures, extravagance, or indulgence.

三十章

以道佐人主者，不以兵强天下，其事好还。师之所处，荆棘生焉。善，有果而已，不敢以取强。果而勿矜，果而勿伐，果而勿骄，果而不得已，是谓果而勿强。物壮则老，是谓不道；不道早已。

30 When Life Reaches Its Prime

He who uses the Dao to assist a ruler would advise against using armies to conquer. Violence begets violence. Where armies camped, thorns and brambles would grow. Those who are good at using force stop right at having achieved their purpose; they dare not show their strength. Having achieved your purpose, you do not aggrandize it. Having achieved your purpose, you do not glorify it. Having achieved your purpose, you do not want to be arrogant. Having achieved your purpose, treat it like no more than having done the necessary. This is to say you only want to achieve a purpose, not to show your strength. When things have reached the prime of life, what happens next is to get old, as dictated by the Dao[1]. Anything that goes against the Dao dies early.

---

1. In the original text, if literally translated, it would be "When things have reached the prime of life, what happens next is to get old because it goes against the Dao." What Lao Zi was trying to say was "as dictated by the Dao" instead of "because it goes against the Dao."

三十一章

兵者不祥之器，非君子之器，不得已而用之。恬淡为上，胜而不美；而美之者是乐杀人。夫乐杀人者，则不可以得志于天下矣。夫唯兵者不祥之器，物[1]或恶之，故有道者不处。君子居则贵左，用兵则贵右。吉事尚左，凶事尚右。偏将军居左，上将军居右，言以丧礼处之。杀人之众，以悲哀莅之。战胜，以丧礼处之。

---

1. 物：此处作“人”解，或包括人在内的万物，引申为“所有人”。

31 Do Not Glorify Victories

Weapons are instruments of bad omen, not the tools of a gentleman. He will not use them unless it is an absolute necessity. Be indifferent to fame or gain, and do not glorify victories. Those who glorify victories of war take delight in the slaughter of men. Those who take delight in the slaughter of men will not win the hearts of the people. Because weapons are instruments of bad omen, all people hate them. Those who follow the Dao will not use them. The gentleman favors the left-hand position at home, but values the right-hand position in a battle. As is known, the left-hand position is the position of honor on happy occasions, and the right-hand position the position of honor in mourning misfortunes. The commander-in-chief takes the right-hand position and the lieutenant commander the left-hand. This is to say they treat the battle as a funeral rite. If masses of people are slaughtered, they mourn the dead with grief and lamentation. If a battle is won, they treat the victory as a funeral.

三十二章

道常，无名，朴，虽小，天下莫能臣。侯王若能守之，万物将自宾。天地相合，以降甘露，民莫之令而自均。始制有名。名亦既有，夫亦将知止，知止所以不殆。譬道之在天下，犹川谷之与江海。

32 Know Where to Stop

The Dao is eternal, nameless, and as simple as an uncarved block of wood. As small as it may be, no one in the world can reduce it to what it is not. If kings and princes hold on to it, all creatures and things will run their own natural course. When Heaven and Earth are one in harmony, sweet rain will fall. With no order coming down, people can share nature's givings on their own. As soon as social institutions are established, there would be names of status. Once there are names of status, one should know it's time to stop. He who knows where to stop will be free from dangers. The Dao works in the world just like valley streams flowing to rivers and seas.

三十三章

知人者智，自知者明。胜人者有力，自胜者强。知足者富，强行者有志。不失其所者久，死而不亡者寿。

33 On Wisdom

He who knows others has intelligence. He who knows himself has wisdom. He who conquers others has strength. He who conquers himself has power. He who is content with what he possesses is rich. He who does things with persistence has will. He who does not lose his center extends. He who has died and is remembered enjoys long life.

三十四章

大道氾[1]兮，其可左右。万物恃之以生而不辞，功成而不有。衣被万物而不为主，可名于小；万物归之而不知主，可名为大。以其终不自为大，故能成其大。

1. 氾：音【fàn】，广泛。

34 On Greatness

How omnipotent the Dao is! It can go left or right as it pleases. All things and creatures are born of it, and yet it does not say a word. It does not lay claim to whatever it accomplishes. It clothes all creatures and things, and yet has no desire to be their master. This can be called "small" in desire. All things and creatures submit to it and yet have no idea who the master is. This can be called "great." The Dao never sees itself as great, and that is how greatness is achieved.

三十五章

执大象[1]，天下往；往而不害，安平泰。乐与饵，过客止。道之出言，淡乎其无味：视之不可见，听之不可闻，用之不可既。

1. 象：道也；大象：大道。

35 The Dao Will Do You Good

Hold on to the Dao, and you will see the whole world come to you. They come with no intention to harm; what they bring is tranquility, peace, and harmony. Music and the smell of food would stop the steps of a passerby, and yet bland and tasteless are words of the Dao. When you look at it, it is invisible. When you listen to it, it is inaudible. When you use it, it is inexhaustible.

三十六章

将欲翕[1]之，必固张之；将欲弱之，必固强之；将欲废之，必固举之；将欲取之，必固予之：是谓微明。柔胜刚，弱胜强。鱼不可脱于渊，国之利器不可以示人。

1. 翕：音【xī】，收缩。

36 Hidden Intelligence

If something is ready to shrink, it must have been expanded too much. If something is ready to abate, it must have been reinforced too much. If something is ready to go, it must have been held too long. If something is ready to be taken, it must have been promised to give. This is what is called hidden intelligence. The soft wins over the hard, and the weak defeats the strong. Fish can't be taken away from water, and the weapons of a state can't be shown to people.

三十七章

道常，无名。侯王若能守之，万物将自化。化而欲作，吾[1]将镇之以无名之朴。镇之以无名之朴，夫亦将无欲。无欲以静，天下将自正。

---

1. 吾：指君王。

37 How to Check Desires

The Dao is eternal and nameless. If kings and princes hold on to it, all things and creatures will run their own natural course. Desires may rise when they run their own natural course. I[1] will use an unaffected and unnamable simplicity to check the rising of desires. Then there would be no such desires. When there is no desire for contention, things will quiet down, and the world will return to its own order.

---

1. "I" refers to a king or prince.

Book II

德经

The De Jing

三十八章

上德不德，是以有德；下德不失德，是以无德。上德无为而无以为，上仁为之而无以为。上义为之而有以为。上礼为之而莫之应，则攘臂而扔之。故失道而后德，失德而后仁，失仁而后义，失义而后礼。夫礼者，忠信之薄而乱之首；前识者，道之华而愚之始。是以大丈夫处其厚不居其薄，处其实不居其华。故去彼取此。

38 High Virtue Shows No Virtue

He who is of high virtue shows no virtue, so he has virtue. He who is of low virtue shows virtue, so he has no virtue. He who is of high virtue not only doesn't act but also has no motivation to act. He who is of high benevolence acts though he has no motivation to act. He who is of high righteousness not only acts but also has his motivation to act.[1] He who is of high proprieties acts, and will roll his sleeves up and force others to do the same if they do not follow.[2] Therefore, when the Dao is lost, there would be virtue. When virtue is lost, there would be benevolence. When benevolence is lost, there would be righteousness. When righteousness is lost, there would be proprieties. Proprieties lack in loyalty and truthfulness; worse, they can incubate chaos.[3] He who claims to be a prophet is no more than an ignorant man holding the Dao like a flower. That's why a true man dwells in what is thick, not thin, and in what is substantive, not flowery. So he discards the latter and keeps the former.

---

1. Again Lao Zi was criticizing Confucian values of "benevolence and righteousness" in governing; he believed that the Daoist approach of "act without acting" is the best governing system.
2. In the eyes of Lao Zi, "proprieties" as a Confucian value of governing could be more deceiving and misleading than "benevolence and righteousness."
3. Lao Zi was ranking, in a descending order, the Daoist notion of virtue, and the three Confucian moral standards of benevolence, righteousness, and proprieties.

三十九章

昔之得一者：天得一以清，地得一以宁，神得一以灵，谷得一以盈，侯王得一以为天下贞。其致之也，天无以清将恐裂，地无以宁将恐废，神无以灵将恐歇，谷无以盈将恐竭，侯王无以为贞而贵高将恐蹶。故贵以贱为本，高以下为基。是以侯王自谓孤、寡[1]、不穀[2]，此非以贱为本邪？非乎？故至誉无誉。不欲琭琭[3]如玉，落落如石。

1. 寡：寡德。
2. 穀：音【gǔ】，谷之繁体，不穀：不得养，不得相养。
3. 琭琭：音【lùlù】，稀少珍贵。

39 Nobility Has Humbleness as Base

It has always been the case since ancient times: Heaven, when it is one with the Dao, will be clear and bright. Earth, when it is one with the Dao, will be calm and quiet. Spirits, when they are one with the Dao, will be divine and active. Valleys, when they are one with the Dao, will be full and abundant. Kings and princes, when they are one with the Dao, will be true leaders. To further the reasoning, Heaven, if not clear and bright, would probably crack. Earth, if not calm and quiet, would probably tear apart. Spirits, if not divine and active, would probably vanish. Valleys, if not full and abundant, would probably dry up. Kings and princes, if unable to govern while in power, would probably fall. Therefore nobility has humbleness as its root, and high has low as its foundation. And that is why kings and princes call themselves "a lonely man, a man of no virtue, or an unworthy." Is it not that they regard humbleness as their foundation? Is it not? Therefore, high honor equals no honor. Do not desire to shine like a piece of good-looking jade, nor do you want to be a hard and yet easy-to-break rock.

四十章

反者道之动，弱者道之用。天下之物生于有，有生于无。

40 The Dao Moves Opposites

Reversion is the movement of the Dao, and moving from weakness is the functioning of the Dao. All things and creatures in the world are born of existence, and existence is born of nothingness.

四十一章

上士闻道，勤而行之；中士闻道，若存若亡；下士闻道，大而笑之。不笑，不足以为道。故建言有之："明道若昧，进道若退，夷道若纇[1]，上德若谷，广德若不足，建德若偷，质德若渝，大白若辱，大方无隅，大器晚成，大音希声，大象无形。"道隐无名。夫唯道，善始且善成。

---

1. 纇：音【lèi】，绞在一起的杂丝团，喻崎岖不平。

41 A Great Voice Is Barely Heard

When a man of high echelon hears about the Dao, he practices it with all diligence. When a man of middle echelon hears about the Dao, he is half-believing and half-doubting. When a man of low echelon hears about the Dao, he laughs at it out loud. The Dao, if not laughed at, would not be the Dao. Therefore there have been such ancient sayings: He who understands the Dao seems slow-witted. He who goes forward with the Dao seems to go back. He who has an easy journey with the Dao seems to travel on a rocky road. He who is of high virtue feels like the virtue is too deep a valley. He who is of expansive virtue feels like the virtue is insufficient. He who builds virtue feels like the virtue needs to be concealed. He who practices pure virtue feels like the virtue has been changed. A great fullness looks eclipsed. A great square sees no corners. A great talent takes time to produce. A great voice is barely heard. A great form has no shape. Though hidden and nameless, the Dao begins well and ends well.

四十二章

道生一，一生二，二生三，三生万物。万物负阴而抱阳，冲气以为和。人之所恶，唯孤寡不穀，而王侯以为称。故物或损之而益，或益之而损。人之所教，我亦教之。“强梁者不得其死”，吾将以为教父。

42 The Dao Produces All

The Dao produces one. One produces two. Two produces three. Three produces all things and creatures. All creatures and things carry yin and embrace yang. These two flows of energy interact to produce a third flow of energy: harmony. What people hate to be is "a lonely man," "a man of no virtue," or "an unworthy." But that is exactly what kings and princes would prefer to be called. Often things grow when one intends to diminish, and they diminish when one tries to grow. I teach what others have taught: "He who exhibits force and commits violence doesn't die a good death." I shall make this the basis of my teaching."

四十三章

天下之至柔，驰骋天下之至坚；出于无有，入于无间；吾是以知无为之有益。不言之教，无为之益，天下希及之。

43 The Soft Wins over the Hard

The softest of things in the world go through the hardest. They come out of nothingness and enter where there is no space. That is how I understand the benefit of acting with no action. Few in the world appreciate the value of teaching without words and the benefit of acting with no action.

四十四章

名与身孰亲？身与货孰多？得与亡孰病？甚爱必大费，多藏必厚亡。知足不辱，知止不殆，可以长久。

44 Have a Contented Mind

Which is intimately closer to you, fame or life? Which is more important to you, life or wealth? Which is more harmful, gain or loss? Unchecked love of fame carries a high price. Excessive accumulation of wealth leads to more losses. A contented mind risks no loss. Knowing when to stop makes one fear no danger. That is how things endure.

四十五章

大成若缺，其用不敝；大盈若盅，其用不穷。大直若诎[1]，大巧若拙，大辩若讷[2]。躁胜寒，静胜热，知清静以为天下正。

1. 诎：音【qū】，言语钝拙。
2. 讷：音【nè】，有话在肚中，不说出来。

45 Calm and Quiet Rules

A great synthesizer, one who sees himself as lacking, has a use that never wanes. A full learner, one who sees himself as empty, has a use that never ends. A straight talker can appear to be crooked. A multi-skilled talent can appear to be clumsy. An eloquent debater can appear to be tongue-tied. Quick movement can bear the chill. Tranquility can sustain the heat. He who is calm and quiet rules the world.

四十六章

天下有道，却走马以粪；天下无道，戎马生于郊。罪莫大于多欲，祸莫大于不知足，咎莫大于欲得。故知足之足，常足矣。

46 Greed Kills

When a country follows the Dao, battle steeds will be retired to till the fields. When the country goes against the Dao, warhorses will breed outside city walls.[1] No guilt is greater than greed. No disaster is worse than discontent. No calamity is more destructive than the desire to get more. Therefore the contentment from a contented mind endures.

1. That means war is near.

四十七章

不出于户，可以知天下；不窥于牖，可以知天道。其出弥远，其知弥鲜。是以圣人不行而知，不见而明，不为而成。

47 Know the Dao, Know the World

Not going out the door, one can still know the world. Not looking out the window, one can still grasp the essence of the Dao. The further one goes, the less one sees. Therefore the sage gets to know without going to know, gets to understand without seeing to understand, and gets to accomplish without acting to accomplish.

四十八章

为学者日益，为道者日损；损之又损之，以至于无为；无为而无不为。将欲取天下者常以无事，及其有事，又不足以取天下矣。

48 Lower Desire to Act

He who learns has his knowledge increase with each passing day. He who practices the Dao lowers his desire to act with each passing day. With the continuous lowering of the desire to act, he can attain the realm of taking no action. When no action is taken, nothing will be left out while acting in their natural way. He who intends to rule the world lets things act in their natural way. When he intends to act his way, he will be in no position to rule the world.

四十九章

圣人无常心，以百姓心为心。善者吾善之，不善者吾亦善之，得善。信者吾信之，不信者吾亦信之，得信。圣人之在天下，歙歙[1]焉，为天下浑心[2]焉。百姓皆注其耳目，圣人皆孩之。

---

1. 歙歙：音【xīxī】，收吸，引申为俭啬无欲。
2. 浑心：浑朴存心。

49 Be Kind to All People

The sage has no fixed mind; he accepts the minds of the people as his. People that are kind I would treat with kindness. People that are not kind I would treat with kindness, too. That is how kindness is acquired. People that are trustworthy I would trust. People that are not trustworthy I would trust, too. That is how trust is nurtured. The sage governs the world in a peaceful way to meet with the hearts of the people. And the people, in return, become the ears and eyes to the sage who sees himself as their child.

五十章

出生入死。生之徒十有三，死之徒十有三，人之生生[1]而动，动皆之死地，亦十有三。夫何故？以其生生之厚。盖闻善摄生者，陆行不遇兕[2]虎，入军不被甲兵；兕无所投其角，虎无所措其爪，兵无所容其刃。夫何故？以其无死地。

1. 生生：养生。前一个“生”字为动词。
2. 兕：音【sì】，古指一种似牛的大兽，也有书说是雌性犀牛。

50 Life Begins and Ends

Life begins when it is born, and ends when it dies. Out of ten who are born, three survive. Out of ten who survive, three die. Out of ten who strive excessively to preserve life, three die of excessiveness. Why is it so? It's because of their excessiveness in preserving life. It is said that he who is good at preserving life would travel the land not bothering to avoid rhinos or tigers, enter a battlefield not wearing a suit of armor or carrying weapons. Now rhinos would have no target to use their horns, tigers would have no target to use their claws, and weapons would have no target to use their sharp edges. Why is it so? It's because he is treading no death land.

五十一章

道生之，德畜之，物形之，势成之。是以万物莫不尊道而贵德。道之尊，德之贵，夫莫之命而常自然。故道生之，德畜之，长之育之，亭之毒之[1]，盖之覆之。生而不有，为而不恃，长而不宰：是谓玄德。

1. 亭之毒之："亭"当读为"成"，"毒"当读为"熟"，皆音同通用。

51 Be No Oppressor

The Dao creates all creatures and things. Virtues rear them, materials shape them, and conditions complete them. Therefore all creatures and things revere the Dao and hold virtues in high esteem. They respect the Dao and hold virtues in high esteem of their own accord with no orders from anybody. So the Dao creates them, and virtues rear them, grow them, nurture them, complete them, mature them, care for them, and protect them. The Dao creates, but claims no ownership; serves, but attaches no conditions; and governs, but be no oppressor. These are called high virtues.

五十二章

天下有始，可以为天下母。既得其母，以知其子；既知其子，复守其母，没身不殆。塞其兑[1]，闭其门，终身不勤。开其兑，济其事，终身不救。见小曰明，守柔曰强。用其光，复归其明，无遗身殃，是谓袭常。

1. 兑：兑为口，引申凡有孔窍者皆可云兑。

52 Mother Is the Dao

The world has its origin, and it can be regarded as Mother of all things and creatures. If you already know Mother, you can proceed to know all things and creatures. If you already proceed to know all things and creatures, and hold on to Mother, you can be protected from dangers for your whole life. Close your mouth and your ears and eyes, so you can protect yourself from falling ill for your whole life. If you uncover life's openings and increase your involvement with things, you will throw yourself into a state of no rescue for your whole life. Seeing things that are small makes you see the world clearly. Preserving what is soft and weak will get you strength. Use the light of the Dao, return to the state of seeing the world clearly, and you will spare yourself disaster. That is the use of the eternal Dao.

五十三章

使[1]我介然[2]有知，行于大道，唯施是畏。大道甚夷，而人好径。朝甚除，田甚芜，仓甚虚；服文彩，带利剑，厌饮食，财货有余：是谓盗竽，非道也哉！

---

1. 使：假使。
2. 介然：坚固的样子。

53 Don't Rob the People

If I firmly believe I am enlightened, I would travel the journey of the Dao and fear only going astray. The road of the Dao is broad and level, but people often go astray. The palaces are immaculate, the fields are overgrown with weeds, and the granaries are empty. They wear elegant embroidered robes, carry sharp swords, indulge in hedonism, and stock wealth and goods they no longer need. They are the ringleaders of robbers. What they practice goes against the Dao.

五十四章

善建者不拔，善抱者不脱，子孙以其祭祀，世世不辍。修之身，其德乃真；修之家，其德乃余；修之乡，其德乃长；修之邦，其德乃丰；修之天下，其德乃普。故以身观身，以家观家，以乡观乡，以邦观邦，以天下观天下。吾何以知天下之然哉？以此。

54 Cultivate Virtues

He who is good at building won't uproot what has been built. He who is good at holding won't let go what has been held. Following the virtue, one generation after another will carry on ancestral sacrifices. If he practices the Dao on himself, his virtues will be real. If he practices the Dao in his family, his virtues will continue. If he practices the Dao in his village, his virtues will be long-lasting. If he practices the Dao in his country, his virtues will be abundant. If he practices the Dao in the world, his virtues will shine everywhere. Therefore when I look at a person, I look at how he cultivates himself. When I look at a family, I look at how family members cultivate themselves. When I look at a village, I look at how villagers cultivate themselves. When I look at a country, I look at how fellow countrymen cultivate themselves. When I look at the world, I look at how the people of the world cultivate themselves. How do I know how things run in the world? That is how I know.

五十五章

含德之厚者，比于赤子。毒虫不螫[1]，猛兽不据，攫鸟不搏。骨弱筋柔而握固，未知牝牡[2]之合而朘[3]作，精之至也；终日号而嗌不嗄[4]，和之至也。知和曰常，知常曰明，益生曰祥，心使气曰僵。

1. 螫：音【shì】，毒虫咬刺。
2. 牡：音【mǔ】，雄性。
3. 朘：音【zuī】，古指男孩生殖器。
4. 嗄：音【shà】，嗓音嘶哑。

55 Live a Natural Way of Life

He who has cultivated abundant virtues in himself can be compared to a newborn baby. Poisonous insects will not sting it. Wild beasts will not attack it. Birds of prey will not peck it. Its bones are weak and its muscles tender, and yet its grip can be firm. It knows nothing about the copulation of a male and female, and yet its penis can erect hard: the working of its physical essence. It cries the whole day, and yet never cries itself hoarse: the working of the perfect balancing of life's vital energy. Knowing such balancing of life's vital energy means knowing the natural way of life. Knowing the natural way of life is wisdom. Indulging in life's pleasures is to court disaster. Letting mind abuse life's vital energy is to destroy one's health.

五十六章

知者不言，言者不知。塞其兑，闭其门；挫其锐，解其分；和其光，同其尘：是谓玄同。故不可得而亲，不可得而疏；不可得而利，不可得而害；不可得而贵，不可得而贱：故为天下贵。

56 Be One with the Average

He who knows doesn't talk; he who talks doesn't know. Keep your mouth shut, and have your ears and eyes closed. Blunt your edges and dissolve your confusions. Soften your brightness, and be one with the average. That is how the mysterious oneness with the Dao is achieved. So do not be close to any one nor should you keep them away. Do not benefit any one nor should you harm them. Do not praise any one nor should you insult them. Thus you command respect by all people.

五十七章

以正治国，以奇用兵，以无事取天下。吾何以知其然哉？以此：天下多忌讳，而民弥贫；民多利器，国家滋昏；民多智慧，邪事滋起；法令滋彰，盗贼多有。故圣人云：我无为而民自化，我好静而民自正，我无事而民自富，我无欲而民自朴。

57 Loosen Control over the People

It takes laws to govern a state. It takes ingenious strategies to win a war. It takes no action to win the hearts of the people. How do I know things go that way? I have learned from the following: The more taboos and prohibitions are created in the country, the fewer people would stay. The more weapons the people possess, the more chaos the country would suffer. The more knowledgeable and wiser the people are, the more trouble they would cause. The more detailed and accurately defined the laws and decrees are, the more thieves and robbers would emerge. Therefore, as the sage would say, when I take no action, the people will then have themselves transformed. When I keep quiet, the people will then have their own wrongs corrected. When I do nothing, the people will then find their way to prosperity. When I have no desires, then the people will keep their unaffected simplicity.

五十八章

其政闷闷，其民淳淳；其政察察，其民缺缺。祸兮，福之所倚；福兮，祸之所伏。孰知其极？其无正！正复为奇，善复为妖。人之迷也，其日固已久矣。是以圣人方而不割，廉[1]而不刿[2]，直而不肆，光而不耀。

---

1. 廉：棱角。
2. 刿：音【guì】，刺伤，划伤。

58 Be Tolerant and Lenient

When a government is tolerant and lenient, more and more people will join in. When a government is probing and punitive, fewer and fewer people will stay on. Misfortune is what fortune leans on, and fortune is where misfortune lies. Who can tell where the ultimate lines are? They are never definite. The normal can revert to abnormal, and goodness can revert to evil. People have been in a state of confusion for too long. Therefore the sage maintains his integrity but will cut no one. He has his edges but will hurt no one. He is straightforward but won't be rude. He is bright but refuses to be dazzling.

五十九章

治人、事天莫若啬[1]。夫唯啬，是以早服[2]；早服是谓重积德。重积德则无不克，无不克则莫知其极；莫知其极可以有国，有国之母可以长久。是谓深根固柢长生久视之道。

---

1. 啬：同穑，收割庄稼。
2. 服：得也，有底，归常。

59 Caring for People's Livelihood

In governing people and serving Heaven, there is nothing more important than to focus on farming.[1] Only through farming, can you have an early preparation[2]. An early preparation adds to your virtues. When your virtues are accumulated, there will be no difficulty that you can't overcome. When there is no difficulty that you can't overcome, you will have limitless capacity. When you have limitless capacity, you will be able to rule your country. A country that is based on this fundamental principle can last long. That is the way to become deeply and firmly rooted for an enduring vision and lasting rule.

---

1. Lao Zi was talking about the importance of caring for people's livelihood.
2. Preparation for storing up for the future.

六十章

治大国若烹小鳞。以道莅天下，其鬼不神。非其鬼不神，其神不伤人；非其神不伤人，圣人亦不伤人。夫两不相伤，故德交归焉。

60 How to Rule a Big Country

Ruling a big country is like frying a small fish.[1] When the world is ruled with the Dao, ancestral spirits will find no place to exert their power. Not ancestral spirits that can't exert their power; it is ancestral spirits' power that does not harm people. Not just ancestral spirits' power that does not harm people, the sage also does not want to harm people. When neither of the ancestral spirits and the sage harm people, their power will join hands to return virtues to people.

1. When you fry a small fish, you can easily break it.

六十一章

大国者，天下之下流，天下之交，天下之牝。牝常以静胜牡，以静为其下。故大国以下小国，则取小国；小国以下大国，则取于大国。故或下以取，或下而取。大国不过欲兼畜人，小国不过欲入事人。夫两者各得其所欲，大者宜为下。

61 Femininity Overcomes Masculinity

A big country should be a river's downstream so that it can be the mixing place of all countries and be loved for its embracing femininity. Femininity often surpasses masculinity with its stillness, a stillness that shows submission and modesty. If a big country submits to a small country with modesty, the big one can take over the heart of the small one. If a small country submits to a big country with modesty, the small one can win the acceptance of the big one. Therefore you can submit yourself in order to take people over, or submit yourself for acceptance. A big country just wishes to expand and grow, whereas a small country just wishes to be accepted and serve others. Therefore for each to get what it wants, a big country had better lie low.

六十二章

道者，万物之奥，善人之宝，不善人之所保。美言可以市尊，美行可以加人。人之不善，何弃之有？故立天子，置三公，虽有拱抱之璧以先驷马，不如坐进此道。古之所以贵此道者何？不曰求以得，有罪以免邪？故为天下贵。

62 The Dao Treats All Equally

The Dao is the Master of all creatures and things. It is the treasure of good people, and the protection of bad people. Good words can buy honor, and good deeds can win respect. How can the Dao reject people who are not good? People can hold, with both hands, the round flat jade preceding the four-horse files[1] to celebrate the crowning of the Son of Heaven[2] and the appointing of his three ministers[3], but it still is not as good as to go down on their knees to pay tribute to the Dao. Why did ancients treasure the Dao so much? Was it not simply for getting what they wanted and lessening the punishments of their crimes? That is why all people under Heaven treasure the Dao.

---

1. The round flat jade was so large that it must be held with both hands, and the man holding the jade would walk ahead of the ceremonial horse files as an auspicious ritual.
2. In ancient China, an emperor was also called "Son of Heaven."
3. In the Zhou Dynasty, the so-called "three ministers" were Taishi, Taifu, and Taibao in charge of the country's education, internal affairs, defense and other state affairs.

六十三章

为无为，事无事，味无味。大小，多少，报怨以德。图难于其易，为大于其细。天下难事必作于易，天下大事必作于细。是以圣人终不为大，故能成其大。夫轻诺必寡信，多易必多难。是以圣人犹难之，故终无难矣。

63 See Big in Small

Act without acting, do things without doing them, and taste without tasting. See big in what is small, and see more in what is less. Return virtue for hatred. Start off with something easy in order to do what is difficult. Work on something small in order to achieve what is big. All difficult things should be dealt with when they are easy. All great causes will be accomplished when small details are attended to. The sage attains greatness because he never seeks to be great. Easy promises lead to lack of trust. Taking too many shortcuts puts one in difficult situations. Therefore the sage approaches things as if they were hard, so in the end there would be nothing too hard to deal with.

六十四章

其安易持，其未兆易谋，其脆易判[1]，其微易散。为之于未有，治之于未乱。合抱之木，生于毫末；九层之台，起于累土；千里之行，始于足下。为者败之，执者失之。是以圣人无为，故无败；无执，故无失。民之从事，常于几成而败之。慎终如始，则无败事。是以圣人欲不欲，不贵难得之货；学不学，复众人之所过：以辅万物之自然而不敢为。

1. 判：分也。

64 A Journey Begins with One Step

That which is at rest is easy to hold. That which shows no signs of movement is easy to plan for. That which is brittle is easy to break. That which is small is easy to disperse. Start working before things happen. Bring things under control before chaos arrives. A giant tree grows out of a tiny sprout. A nine-story tower rises from a basket of earth. A thousand-mile[1] journey begins with one step. He who acts will fail. He who holds will lose. The sage does not act, so he does not harm. The sage does not hold, so he does not lose. In their handling of things, people often fail to touch the finish line when it is so close. If one remains as careful at the end as at the beginning, there would be little chance for failure. Therefore, the sage desires what others do not desire, does not value things that are hard to get, and learns what others do not learn to avoid the mistakes that many of them have made. He doesn't dare to act on his will, making sure that things take their own natural course.

---

1. The original Chinese measurement is 里 (pronounced *li*, and one *li* is approximates 0.5 kilometer or 0.3107 mile). One thousand-*li* journey simply means a long one so the translator uses the word mile instead of *li* for an easy understanding by an English speaker.

六十五章

古之善为道者，非以明民，将以愚之。民之难治，以其多智。故以智治国，国之贼；不以智治国，国之福。知此两者，亦稽式[1]。常知稽式，是谓玄德。玄德深矣远矣，与物反矣，然后乃至大顺。

1. 稽：楷之借字，楷，法也。稽式：即法式。

65 Virtue Leads to Grand Harmony

In ancient times good Dao practitioners chose not to enlighten the people; they made them simple-minded. It's hard to reign over the people as they have too much cleverness. Therefore he who rules a country with cleverness will ruin it; he who rules without it will be its blessing. When you know these two contrasting models, you know the way to rule. If you always know to rule this way, you should have acquired the mysteriously profound virtue. This mysteriously profound virtue, deep and far-reaching, and different from the practices of others, will eventually bring grand harmony to the country.

六十六章

江海所以能为百谷王者，以其善下之，故能为百谷王。是以圣人欲上民，必以言下之；欲先民，必以身后之。是以圣人处上而民不重，处前而民不害。是以天下乐推而不厌。不以其无争与？故天下莫能与争。

66 Be Good at Lying Low

The rivers and seas can be King of all valley streams because they are good at lying low. Likewise the sage, if he wishes to stay above the people, must speak humbly to position himself below the people. If he wishes to lead the people, he must put his self-interests behind the people. Therefore when the sage stays above the people, they don't feel his weight. When he is ahead of the people, they don't feel harmed. Therefore the whole world happily supports him and never gets tired of him. Is it not that simply because he doesn't contend with anyone, so no one will contend with him?

六十七章

天下皆谓我大，似不肖。夫唯大，故不肖。若肖，久矣其细也夫！我有三宝，持而宝之。一曰慈，二曰俭，三曰不敢为天下先。慈，故能勇；俭，故能广；不敢为天下先，故能成器长。今舍慈且勇，舍俭且广，舍后且先，死矣！夫慈，以战则胜，以守则固。天将救之，以慈卫之。

67 Lead by Staying Behind

Everyone in the world says I[1] am great, whom I seem not. Only do people say I am great, I am not whom I seem to be. If I had been truly great, I must have been small and insignificant for quite a while now. I have three treasures, and hold them as dear: One is kindness. Two is frugality. Three is daring not to be ahead of the world. Kindness, therefore, there can be bravery. Frugality, therefore, there can be expansion. Daring not to be ahead of the world, therefore, one can lead the world. Now, if you talk about bravery without kindness, expansion without frugality, or going ahead of the world without putting your self-interests behind, you are simply kissing death. Being kind, you can win when you fight; you can hold when you defend. Heaven will help, and your kindness can protect you.

---

1. Here "I" refers to kings and princes using the first person.

六十八章

善为士者不武，善战者不怒，善胜敌者不与，善用人者为之下。是谓不争之德，是谓用人之力，是谓配天之极。

68 The Virtue of Non-Competition

A good soldier doesn't show his muscle. A good fighter doesn't get angry. A good commander doesn't praise himself for winning. A good leader puts himself below those he leads. This is called the virtue of non-competition, the art of leadership, and the highest standard that meets the law of Heaven.

六十九章

古之用兵者有言："吾不敢为主而为客，不敢进寸而退尺。"是谓行无行，攘无臂，执无兵，扔无敌。祸莫大于无敌，无敌几丧吾宝。故抗兵相若[1]，哀者胜矣。

---

1. 相若：相当。

69 Take Your Enemy Seriously

Some war strategist of the ancient times had this to say: "I dare not be the host of a war; I cannot but be the war's guest to defend myself. I dare not advance an inch; I'd rather retreat a foot." This is called marching with no ranks to march, rolling up sleeves with no arms to raise, facing enemy with no enemy to face, and holding up weapons with no weapons to hold. No disaster is bigger than underestimating your enemy. Underestimating your enemy will cost you the treasures[1]. When two warring sides are close in strength, the side that wins the sympathy wins.

---

1. Lao Zi mentioned the "three treasures" in Chapter 67.

七十章

吾言甚易知，甚易行；而人莫之能知，莫之能行。言有宗，事有君。夫唯无知，是以不我知。知我者希，则我者贵。是以圣人被褐[1]怀玉。

---

1. 褐：音【hè】，粗麻织成的衣服。

70 Put the Dao into Practice

My words are quite easy to understand, and quite easy to practice. But no one seems to understand them, or put them into practice. My words have their origin, just as things have rules to follow. People don't understand that, so they don't understand me. Few understand me, and rarely do they practice what I say. Therefore the sage wears coarse cloth, holding the jade[1] in his bosom.

---

1. The jade is the Dao.

七十一章

知不知，尚矣；不知知，病矣。是以圣人不病，以其病病[1]，夫唯病病，是以不病。

1. 病病：前一个“病”字为动词。

71 Your Best Knowledge

Knowing that you don't know is your best knowledge. Pretending to know what you don't know is a mind sickness. Therefore the sage doesn't have that mind sickness since he is sick of that sickness. Only when one is sick of that mind sickness, will one not be sick-minded.

七十二章

民不畏威，则大威至矣。无狎[1]其所居，无压其所生。夫唯不压，是以不厌。是以圣人自知，不自见；自爱，不自贵。故去彼取此。

1. 狎：同狭，排挤、逼压。

72 Care More for the People

The Greatest dread is when the people no longer fear the dreadful. Do not squeeze their dwellings, nor should you destroy their means of livelihood. Only when you do not oppress the people, will the people not rebel against you. Therefore the sage knows who he is but doesn't brag about himself. He cherishes self-respect but doesn't see himself above the people. He just rejects the latter and accepts the former.

七十三章

勇于敢则杀，勇于不敢则活。此两者，或利或害。天之所恶，孰知其故？天之道，不争而善胜，不言而善应，不召而自来，缂[1]然而善谋。天网恢恢，疏而不失。

---

1. 缂：音【chǎn】，舒缓、松懈。

73 The Net of Heaven

He who exhibits bravery through reckless action gets killed. He who is brave with no reckless action survives. Of the two braveries, one benefits, one harms. Heaven abhors what it abhors, who knows why! The way of Heaven wins without having to compete, responds without having to speak, acts of its own accord without having to be called, and plans well, looking relaxed. Expansive is the net of Heaven, which has sparse meshes and yet won't let things slip through.

七十四章

民不畏死，奈何以死惧之？若使民常畏死，而为奇者吾得执而杀之，孰敢？若民常且必畏死，常有司杀者[1]杀。夫代司杀者杀，是代大匠斫[2]。夫代大匠斫者，希有不伤其手矣。

1. 司杀者：此处指管人的生死的自然或上天。
2. 斫：音【zhuó】，用刀、斧砍劈。

74 What if People Fear No Death

If people fear no death, how can you scare them with death? If people do fear death, and when you seize the lawbreakers and put them to death, who would then dare to make trouble? If people truly always fear death, there would then always be the judiciary to take care of their deaths. Whoever substitutes the role of the judiciary will be like one going to chop wood instead of a master carpenter. Few who chop wood substituting a master carpenter would not have their fingers cut.

七十五章

民之饥，以其上食税之多，是以饥。民之难治，以其上之有为，是以难治。民之轻死，以其上生生之厚，是以轻死。夫唯无以生为者，是贤于贵生。

75 Value More, Worry Less about Life

People starve simply because their rulers eat up too much of their tax grain. People are difficult to rule simply because their rulers try to rule their way. People take death too lightly simply because their rulers care too much for their life. So people who care less for life are wiser than those who value it more.

七十六章

人之生也柔弱，其死也坚强。草木之生也柔脆，其死也枯槁。故坚强者死之徒，柔弱者生之徒。是以兵强则灭，木强则折。坚强处下，柔弱处上。

76 A Hard Tree Is Easy to Break

Life is soft and weak at birth; it is hard and stiff at death. Plants are soft and weak while growing; they dry and wither away when they die. Therefore, things that are hard and strong are set to die, and things that are soft and weak set to grow. A strong army is easy to lose, and a hard tree easy to break. The hard and strong will slide down, and the soft and weak will move up.

七十七章

天下道其犹张弓[1]与！高者抑之，下者举之；有余者损之，不足者补之。天之道，损有余而补不足。人之道则不然，损不足以奉有余。孰能有余以奉天下？唯有道者。是以圣人为而不恃，功成而不处，其不欲见贤。

---

1. 张弓：上公弦。

77 Cut the Excesses

Is the way of Heaven not like bending a bow? When the bow is too high, press it down. When it's too low, raise it up. When it's too much, cut it down. When it's too little, add it up. Heaven's way is to cut the excesses and help those who do not have enough. Men's way is different, however; they would cut those who do not have enough but give more to those who already have too much. Who would be willing to give away the surplus to the people? Only those who follow the Dao. Therefore the sage serves, but attaches no conditions; accomplishes, but takes no credit; is talented, but has no desire to show.

七十八章

天下莫柔弱于水，而攻坚强者莫之能胜。以其无以易之也。弱之胜强，柔之胜刚，天下莫不知，莫能行。是以圣人云：受国之垢，是谓社稷主；受国之不祥，是谓天下王。正言若反。

78 The Most Powerful Thing on Earth

Nothing in the world is softer and weaker than water, but nothing can surpass it in fighting the hard and strong. There is nothing in the world that can replace water. The weak overcomes the strong, the soft overcomes the hard. Everyone in the world knows it, but no one practices it. Therefore the sage had this to say: "He who sustains the shame for the state is its true master, and he who bears the misfortune of the state its king of the people." Ironically, these are true words.

七十九章

和大怨必有余怨，安可以为善？是以圣人执左契而不责于人。有德司契，无德司彻。天道无亲，常与善人。

79 Heaven Favors Kinder People

After a great enmity is reconciled, there must remain some resentment. How can you say it is well settled? Therefore the sage, though he carries the left-hand part of a contract as creditor[1], does not force the other to fulfill his obligations. He who is virtuous honors the contract. He who has no virtue only forces its fulfillment. Heaven's way treats all equally, but always lends more help to kinder people.

---

1. In ancient China, a typical contract would consist of two parts, the left part, which was held by the lender, and the right part, held by the borrower.

八十章

小国寡民，使有什伯之器而不用，使民重死而远徙。虽有舟与，无所乘之；虽有甲兵，无所陈之；使民复结绳而用之。甘其食，美其服，乐其俗，安其居。邻国相望，鸡犬之声相闻，民至老死不相往来。

80 The Dream of a Perfect World

Let the country be small and its population controlled. Let the tools and utensils of all kinds be stocked. Tell the people to value their lives and not to move away. Though there are boats and carriages, there should be no needs to ride them. Though there are amour and weapons, there should be no places to display them. Tell people to go and tie knots to make fishing nets. Let them be content with their food, like their clothes, enjoy their customs, and settle down in their homes. Let the neighboring countries look at each other, seeing none of them visit each other throughout their lives though the crowing of their cocks and the barking of their dogs are within the hearing of each other.

八十一章

信言不美，美言不信。知者不博，博者不知。善者不多，多者不善。圣人不积。既以为人，己愈有。既以与人，己愈多。天之道，利而不害；圣人之道，为而不争。

81 The Sage Does Not Stock Wealth

True words are not high-sounding; high-sounding words are not true. He who knows does not brag about his knowledge; he who brags about his knowledge does not know.He who is able is not good at all things; he who is good at everything is not able. The sage does not stock wealth. When he does everything for others, he himself gains. When he gives everything to others, he himself gets more. Heaven's way is to benefit, not to harm. The sage's way is to accomplish, not to compete.

后记

我译《道德经》

译文出版社2019年出的这部《道德经》英译本，是我十年前就开始的一项计划。想当初，计划一确定，就心生后怕：在译家辈出、译著满目的当今书市，我如何能让老子用自己的口，说出最通俗易懂的英文，把他的智慧与世分享？

我的后怕很快就被证实。翻译《道德经》与翻译一部现代哲学著作相比，有着天壤之别。让两千五百年前的中国老子，改说一口既精准又通俗的现代英语，那等于让他过一座不可跨越的断桥。这座断桥不可跨越，因为有四个过不去的坎：一是时间跨度（长至两千五百年）；二是空间跨度（从古代东方到现代西方）；三是古汉语与现代英语有极大的不可通约性；四是这部中国哲学元典的厚重和不可破译的内在神性。

我读《道德经》，如读天书。天书不可解，唯其不可解，古今注家不下千数，中西译家几近三百。

我这十年，始终在这四个坎的漩涡中打转，在这风光绮丽但有虎狼出没的断桥上，去去来来，恍恍惚惚，不断地在桥的断裂处冒险跳跃，常常早晨跃了过去，晚上又跳了回来。但我始终记着十年前许下的诺言：我要把文言文《道德经》译成世上最容易吟诵、最容易读懂的英文译本。

十年过去了。我请上老子，一起来见我的读者和学生，告诉他们这断桥我们已经过了。翻译《道德经》是过一座过不去的桥，是老子帮着我一起过去了的，奥秘何在?

老子曰：“道之为物，惟恍惟惚。惚兮恍兮，其中有象；恍兮惚兮，其中有物。窈兮冥兮，其中有情。其情甚真，其中有信。自今及古，其名不去，以阅众甫。”翻译《道德经》，尤为灵验。

（2017年9月2日初稿，
2019年4月11日改于美国康州西哈特福德市）

附文

《道德经》八十一章选句解读

居延安

引　言

物物有论，一物一论。书有书论，如孙过庭的《书谱》；文有文论，如刘勰的《文心雕龙》；画有画论，如黄宾虹的《仙山楼阁》。经典诠释，也有论。解读老子，没有诠释理论指导，很难解读。我在美国大学带着学生学老子，总是先讲诠释学(hermeneutics)。诠释学，像任何一门成熟的学科一样，由诠释历史、诠释理论和诠释实践三大部分组成。Hermeneutics 源自希腊语，是了解、理解、解释的意思。

历史文本，特别是经典文本解读，如《圣经》，如美国的宪法，没有诠释学理论框架的限定，谁听谁的？老子的版本多达七百种，自韩非子以降，解老读本早过千数。我出了本《道德经》的英文翻译，朋友以为了不得，殊不知老子的外文译著已届三百。也有方家曾坚信不疑地对我说："《道德经》的全球读者数仅次于《圣经》"。为了翻译老子，除了冯达甫，我还读过包括林语堂在内的十数本解老注释文本，公说公有理，婆说婆有理，青菜萝卜，各挑各的，我在一片浑沌之余，发现了一个共同点：他们都很少谈诠释学，很少谈自己的解老理论。西方有"圣经诠释学"，专门

研究《圣经》的诠释历史、诠释理论和诠释实践。东方为何没有“老子诠释学”，一门专事研究老子诠释的历史、理论和实践的综合学科？

作为老子《道德经》的英文翻译，我自始至终告诫自己，尽管翻译不是解读，不是演绎，但翻译理论也是诠释理论的一个组成部分。严复提出翻译“信、达、雅”三字译论，首论是个“信”字，就是必须忠实于原文。严复没有深入研究译者是如何受到外在环境和自身价值取向制约的，也没有探索文本的历史真实与译者经验“前结构”之间的矛盾和最终融合。我在电脑键盘上打的是老子的译文，时时处处要核对老子原文，不敢有丝毫懈怠。但同时我有着受自己经验前结构制约的解读、演绎和逻辑推理。我大脑在翻译，心里在谬赞、在质疑，在想如何用自己的诠释理论写一篇译文之外的文章。

记得那是 2017 年 10 月的一个秋日，新英格兰的枫叶一片灿烂，我坐在康州西哈特福德家玻璃屋的藤椅上，开始构思“《道德经》八十一章选句解读”的文章。说写就写，鸡年留给我的时间已经不多了。我深知自己无力对《道德经》作出全面评价，更无高论可发，我只能一章一句一个观点地来写。我一边校阅自己的译文，一边把我原先圈点过的警言佳句记录在卡片上，一边在手提电脑上敲打起来。我教务繁忙，平日大多时间用于上课和与学生的周旋中，每天挤出的时间都是碎片化的，我只能指望周末和深夜。就这样写写停停、停停写写，鸡年去了，狗年来了，我在不经意中完成了八十一个短篇，合在一起就成了“《道德经》八十一章选句解读”。老子有“道经”和“德经”两部分，早年是“德经”在前“道经”在后，之后前后翻了一个身，先“道经”后

“德经”。《道德经》章节结构的宽松，给了作文难得的自由，让我穿梭于时间碎片之间，完成了这篇断论式的“译文之外的文章”。

正　文

一、道，可道，非常道；名，可名，非常名。

老子第一章首句为“道，可道，非常道。”世上读过老子的，首先记住的就这句话：道，假如可以（完完整整地）道出的话，那就不是永恒的道了。接下去的一句当然是“名，可名，非常名。”译成现代汉语就是：名，假如可以（完完整整地）名全的话，就不是永恒的名了。老子八十一章，说了那么多“道”理，也只是老子悟到的一部分，而常道是永恒博大的、不可穷尽的、神秘玄妙的、无法用语言表述的。就像绝对真理，我们只可部分地接近，不可全部地获得。

二、天下皆知美之为美，斯恶已。

这是第二章首句的前半句。老子第二章用两分法展现了他朴素的对立统一思想。“天下皆知美之为美，斯恶已；皆知善之为善，斯不善已。”没有丑，哪有美？不知恶，怎知善？《道德经》通篇贯穿了很多朴素的无可质疑的辩证思想。

三、为无为，则无不治。

第三章末句“为无为，则无不治”是老子名句。“无为”不可理解为“什么事情都不做了”，应该理解为“违反道的、不合自然规律的、为一己私利服务的事情不可做、不可为。”有了这个理解，是不是《道德经》就读懂了一半呢？

四、道冲，而用之或不盈。

第四章很短，就30个汉字。开句“道冲”二字，是说“道像个巨大的容器”，紧接着跟了“而用之或不盈”六个字，这是在说“怎么用都无法填满”。这个比喻呼应了第一章，说了道的无限性、永恒性和神秘性。

五、多闻数穷，不如守中。

早先的许多版本是“多言数穷，不如守中”，一个说多闻多听不好，一个说多言多话不好，但都说了“不如守中”。这个“中”字，大多理解为“守静”、“守心”、“守住天下正道”，儒释道三家都讲“守中”。我觉得翻译不是解释，更不是演绎，而是两种不同的象征符号的转换，因此这个“中”译为middle是最合老子的原意的，评家和读者怎么理解那是他们的事了。

六、谷神不死。

第六章不过25个汉字，但这可能是我最喜欢的一章，也自认为译得最好的一章。我在该中英双语本（美国版）正文前选登了老子的两段引语，以飨读者先睹为快。第一段就选了这章的全部文字：“谷神不死，是谓玄牝。玄牝之门，是谓天地根。绵绵若存，用之不勤。”谷神指代被老子赞为天地之根的女性精神——低调、不争、包容、奉献。

七、天长地久。

老子在这一章讲了为何天长地久的道理，他认为“天地所以能长且久者，以其不自生，故能长生”。“不自生”，不为自己

而存在，这是何等的大德！老子在告诉世上的君王要做到大公无私，因为只有做到了大公无私，自己的那点小私也自然地得到了满足。

八、上善若水。

老子的“不争”思想在《道德经》里随处可见。名句“上善若水”就是第八章的首句，在理解上，人们常强调老子的从善、行善价值。我反复诵读这一章，觉得老子在这里通过对“水性”的描述，强调的是他的“不争”思想。理由很简单：老子开篇全句是“上善若水，水善利万物而不争”，结句为“夫唯不争，故无尤”，意思是，就是因为与人不争，人就不会怨天尤人了。

九、功遂身退。

老子在这一章告诫君王，凡事要讲个度，该停的时候要停，该退的时候要退。他说：“持而盈之，不如其已；揣而锐之，不可长保。金玉满堂，莫之能守；富贵而骄，自遗其咎。”意思是，拥有的财富过多，就该适可而止了；把工具锤得太锋利，是不能长保的；金玉满堂，是守不住的；富贵了就会骄横跋扈，那是要招灾的。因此老子劝告：“功遂身退，天之道哉！”在当今世界上，该退的不退，该停的不停，到末了，身败名裂、不见棺材不落泪的例子比比皆是。

十、营魄抱一。

“营魄抱一”演绎一下就是“修身养心，身心合一”，这一句并不能涵盖这一章的主旨。第十章多有争议，老子是在讲修身养心呢，还是在叮嘱君王如何爱民治国？本章开首两句“营魄抱

一，能无离乎？专气致柔，能婴儿乎？”（“营魄抱一”是“身心合一”的意思），像是在讲修身养心，但紧接着来了“涤除玄鉴，能无疵乎？爱民治国，能无为乎？”，是在向君王问话。这章的末句是第五十一章重复的、本书卷首选载的，这就是老子一再推崇的圣人品行：“生而不有，为而不恃，长而不宰。”我反复诵读，苦思冥想，觉得修身养心与治国安民没有矛盾，老子还是把第十章赠与了他侍奉的君王。

十一、无之以为用。

该章末句是“无之以为用”，意思是“（物品的）使用性在其不用之时”。老子 2 500 年前说的这个道理，让我想起了经济学中两个既对立又统一的概念：价值与使用价值。在一个“鸡犬之声相闻，老死不相往来”的社会，各种用品没有资本社会中的商品所拥有的“价值”，有的是“使用价值”。老子用最朴素的语言界定了“使用价值”的含义。我们知道，有了商品就有买卖，有了买卖，就有了“价值”。一个只有“使用价值”而没有“价值”概念的社会，大概才是最为淳朴、最少私欲的社会。老子小国寡民社会的梦想早已随着“价值”的产生而破灭。

十二、圣人为腹不为目。

老子在第十二章批评了声色犬马、恣情纵欲的生活方式，提倡节俭、节制的生命价值取向。他告诫：“五色令人目盲，五音令人耳聋，五味令人口爽，驰骋畋猎令人心发狂，难得之货令人行妨。”老子以为这不该是圣人的追求，圣人的修为应该是“为腹不为目”，意思是，君王要像平民百姓一样，吃饱肚子就行了，别沉

迷于声色犬马、寻欢作乐的生活。

十三、及吾无身，吾有何患。

“及吾无身，吾有何患”是这一章的一个重要设问：“假如把你自己看作不存在的，你还有什么可以惧怕的呢？”老子《道德经》有些章节，字字句句都是惊世箴言，都能振聋发聩。读老子，要逐字逐句地推敲，以谙熟经义。人的一生，为名所累，为利所困，为生死而担惊受怕。听了老子，忘了自我，生死也就置之度外了。

十四、能知古始，是谓道纪。

本章末句是“能知古始，是谓道纪”。第十四章的核心内容讲的是道的神奇玄妙和不可捉摸，是老子对宇宙和天地的美丽猜想。这一章的主旨是最后两句话：“执古之道，以御今之有，能知古始，是谓道纪。”老子的早期版本有一字之差：“执今之道，以御今之有，能知古始，是谓道纪。”道，既然是宇宙和自然的规律，那么古之道、今之道，同是老子说的道。知今能推古事，知古能断今事，古今在握，也就明白“道”为何物了。

十五、敝而新成。

“敝而新成”是这一章的末句。老子第十五章赞美了“古之善为道者”，说他们“微妙玄通，深不可识”。老子用了各种比喻来描述他们的谦恭谨慎和敦厚质朴，哪怕世事浑浊也能廓清迷雾，重新安身立命。该章末句点出了主旨：“保此道者不欲盈，夫唯不盈，故能敝而新成。”意思是说，要顺应自然，按客观规律来行

事，谨防自满，那么栽了跟斗，还能东山再起。这让人想起宋代诗人陆游的诗句："山重水复疑无路，柳暗花明又一村。"

十六、致虚极，守静笃。

老子以为，只有"致虚极，守静笃"，人才能平心客观地观察世上的万事万物，生生死死，各个复归其根。老子说，周而复始是自然的一个永恒规律，只有把握了这个"常"，人才能知晓"道"为何物。老子的逻辑是："知常，容。容乃公，公乃全，全乃天，天乃道，道乃久，没身不殆。"这无疑是在教导君王："你知道了生命终究要复根的规律，你就懂得包容，有了包容就可大公无私，有了大公无私就能做君王，做了君王就顺应天意，顺应了天意就得道了，道是永存的，你将一生无灾无难。"以此可见"致虚极，守静笃"是多么的重要。

十七、信不足，焉有不信。

根据上下文，这句的意思是"君王不讲诚信，那么百姓就不会信他"。该章讲的是君民关系，老子说了四种君民关系："太上，下知有之；其次，亲之誉之；其次，畏之；其次，侮之。"第一种，最为智慧的，让百姓知道你存在就行了；第二种，稍缺智慧的，让百姓亲近和赞美你；第三种，智慧更少的，让百姓害怕你；第四种，最没智慧的，让百姓鄙视你。老子的告诫是"以诚取信"。

十八、大道废，焉有仁义。

注家对第十八章的理解颇有分歧，经过反复思考和权衡，我

修正了我第一版的翻译。这又是一个短篇，共30个汉字："大道废，焉有仁义；智慧出，焉有大伪；六亲不和，焉有孝慈；国家昏乱，焉有忠臣。"老子说："大道废弃了，便有了仁义；智巧出现了，便有了诡计；六亲不和了，便有了孝慈；国家混乱了，便有了忠臣。"在老子眼里，这也是一种不为人的意志所转移的自然规律；社会，像大自然一样，也有着自我矫正的"无为机制"。行文大部在说"坏世出好人"的道理，就"智慧出，焉有大伪"一句，在说聪明过了头，也会生出诡计多端之徒。

十九、见素抱扑，少私寡欲。

同样地，注家对这一章也多有争议，比如对"绝圣弃智"的今译和英译。我赞同赵又春的理解，他的今译帮助了我的英译。我把"绝圣弃智"译为：Don't pretend to be a sage and don't be too clever. 同时，我把"见素抱扑，少私寡欲"也译得更通俗了：Be plain and simple, and control your desires and selfishness. 该章末句"绝学无忧"，可读成"绝教无优"，英文为：Give up teaching and feeling superior.

二十、人之所畏，不可不畏。

该章开篇是两个问句："唯之与阿，相去几何？美之与恶，相去何若？"老子是在问君王："人对你君王唯唯诺诺，与你对人厉声说不，有什么区别呢？而美行与恶行，相去多远呢？"接下来就是老子对君王的一个告诫："人之所畏，不可不畏。"这句话的意思是"怕君王的人也是可怕的"。再下来就是君王（"我"）毫无忌讳地自我调侃，自然洒脱，他一定既讨厌人的唯唯诺诺，又谨防随意训斥

下官，应有的品格是对美行的崇尚、对臣民的敬畏、对道的信奉。这一章的末句是："我独异于人，而贵食母。"这里"母"可以读成一个双关字，乳母（养育生命的根本）和道（道比作母多处出现）。

二十一、孔德之容，惟道是从。

道是原理，德为实践，德的实践只能在道的指引下推进。老子把道、德的互动写得"惟恍惟惚"，充满了神秘。要囊括世上万事万物的德行之旅，这可能是最简约的概括了。这两句的英译是：The Dao, as it acts, is so fleeting, so alternating. Alternating and fleeting, there appear shapes in between; fleeting and alternating, there seem to be things around.

二十二、曲则全。

"曲则全"是本章首句，注译行家大多译为"委屈倒反而保全了"，我以为冯达甫理解的"有了部分，才有全部"更为契合语境。严复说："曲，一部分也。"因此，英文我译成了：It is partial, therefore it is complete. 曾被称为现代欧洲哲学之父的笛卡尔有一句名言叫"我思故我在"（I think, therefore I am），这里的"曲则全"的英译就采用了笛卡尔的这个句式。二百年前就去世了的、受到笛卡尔影响、后来又影响了尼采的黑格尔，不知是否读过 1788 年译成拉丁文的第一部传往欧洲的《道德经》，如果读过，那么黑格尔一定从第二十二章中感受到了老子的辩证语言的魅力："曲则全，枉则直，洼则盈，敝则新，少则得，多则惑。"补充说一句，老子这一章目的不是谈哲学、谈辩证法，而是要告诉君王"执一为天下牧"，即顺应大道，为天下人作出榜样。

二十三、希言自然。

老子告诫君王少说话，少发政令，一切顺应自然规律。他举了自然界的例子，说“飘风不终朝，骤雨不终日。”风雨是天地所作，连天地都无法左右，更“况于人乎”！

二十四、企者不立。

这章首句是“企者不立”，告诉君王，踮着脚是无法站立稳当的。“自见者不明，自是者不彰，自伐者无功，自矜者不长。”自见，就是自我表现；自是，就是自以为是；自伐，就是自我夸耀；自矜，就是自命不凡。老子以为，崇奉道的君王就会力戒这“四自”。

二十五、道法自然。

这一章说了冥冥宇宙间有“四大”：“道大，天大，地大，人亦大。”本章有两大读点，第一，老子特别指出“域中有四大，而人居其一焉。”第二，说了人、地、天、道、自然之间的层级关系：“人法地，地法天，天法道，道法自然。”“道法自然”四字，道出了道的最终依托所在。顺便说一句，林语堂把道法自然的“法”译为 model after，意思是“效法于”，强调具体的仿效的方法（我以为具体是无法仿效的）。这里译为 submit to, 意思是“受制于”，强调的是内在的不可违抗的“谁属谁统领”的关系。

二十六、轻则失根，躁则失君。

这一章前面两句“重为轻根，静为躁君”与末尾两句“轻则失根，躁则失君”正好对应。老子在简短的正文中，把“君子终

日行不离辎重；虽有荣观，燕处超然”的持重、守静的为人处事方式，与“万乘之主”的君王轻率对待天下的态度作了对比，告诫君王：轻率待人会失根，浮躁处事会失控。

二十七、常善救人，常善救物。

该章一共用了11个“善”字，先说了善行，善言，善数，善闭无关楗，善结无绳约。然后进人正题，教导君王向圣人学习，要善于救人、善于救物：“圣人常善救人，故无弃人；常善救物，故无弃物。”章末老子特别提到，善人与善人可以互敬为师，善人对不善人不可鄙弃，要视为资源，所谓“不贵其师，不爱其资，虽智大迷，是谓要妙。”

二十八、知其荣，守其辱。

本章开篇有三句话，一句是“知其雄，守其雌”，一句是“知其白，守其黑”，我选了第三句“知其荣，守其辱”。雌雄、黑白、荣辱，不仅要知晓，而且须守住。第二十八章较难解的最后两句：“朴散则为器，圣人用之则为官长。故大制无割。”一块完整的木头被劈散后做成了器具——这当然是一个比方——圣人会具体地来用，成为各级官员的首长（官长）。老子的意思，“朴”是不可散的，散了就没“朴”可言了，“圣人用之”是不得已而为之。现在可以理解最后一句“故大制无割”了，意思是：庞大的管理制度是不可任意切割的。

二十九、天下神器，不可为也。

这一章仍然告诫君王统治国家必须按事物的自然规律行事，

说“天下神器，不可为也，不可执也。为者败之，执者失之”。不仅不可为，而且不可执，“为”了，即违反各种规律去“为”了，必败无疑；想握在自己的手里（“执”），也迟早会失去。本章最后一句“是以圣人去甚、去奢、去泰”，意思是：因此圣人不会纵欲过度、奢华过度、享乐过度。

三十、物壮则老。

这里选了老子一贯强调的“物壮则老”的自然规律作智慧警句，尽管这一章的主旨是老子的反战思想和用兵方略。本章开篇就是“以道佐人主者，不以兵强天下，其事好还”，说的是，用道来辅佐君主的人，信奉不以兵器和暴力来取天下，因为暴力会导致暴力。老子认为，用兵不是为了示强，而是不得已而为之。战争打赢了，哪怕你是世界第一强国，武器装备全球第一，接下来怎么办呢？接下来就是第一变第二，因为你不可能永远第一。老子就用自然规律来说理了：“物壮则老”。老子还补上这一末句“不道早已”，意思是：违反了道，老得还早些。

三十一、恬淡为上，胜而不美。

这是上一章的续篇，更为鲜明地展示了老子的反战思想和战争胜利后的处置方法。本章开篇说：“兵者不祥之器，非君子之器，不得已而用之。”武器是不祥的东西，因为武器是用来杀人的，因此只能不得已而为之。老子以为，战争打赢了，双方都死了人，一定要“恬淡为上，胜而不美”，“杀人之众，以悲哀莅之。战胜，以丧礼处之。”试问：2 500 年来，哪个军队、哪个将军、哪个领袖是这样做的呢？

三十二、知止所以不殆。

此章讲了古代先民的分配制度，有一段话，各人有各自的理解——注家只能靠自己的理解去翻译了——“始制有名。名亦既有，夫亦将知止，知止所以不殆。”我的理解是，一旦社会体制建立，就有了分配的名称和标准，既然有了具体的分法，那么就该停止另立规矩了。这样理解的理由来自这段话的前一句“天地相合，以降甘露，民莫之令而自均。”这是说，在社会体制建立前，自然的“甘露”在没有上面下达的分配“命令”情况下，百姓自己来平均地进行分配了。有了体制建立的名分和分配标准，那么自然地就该停止原先的“自均”方法。译者以为，老子“知止不殆”的教导，与“不如守中”的思想是一致的。知止，就是无为、不争、自静、法道。

三十三、自知者明。

本章不长，但每句都是警句：“知人者智，自知者明。胜人者有力，自胜者强。知足者富，强行者有志。不失其所者久，死而不亡者寿。”“强行者有志”中的“强行者”像是违反了老子自己的一贯思想，其实并没有。“强行者”在这里的意思是“坚持努力的人”，坚持努力遵循道的人，恰恰是老子的愿望。

三十四、不自为大，故能成其大。

第三十四章再次颂扬了大道大德，且抄录全篇于此：“大道氾兮，其可左右。万物恃之以生而不辞，功成而不有。衣被万物而不为主，可名于小；万物归之而不知主，可名为大。以其终不自为大，故能成其大。”我的警句选句是“不自为大，故能成其大”。

不管老子是在赞扬圣人的德行，还是在赞美道的伟大，现代人都应该认真学习、好生修炼。

三十五、道之出言，淡乎其无味。

本章又是一个短篇，内容承接上一章，可看作上一章的续篇。老子继续在赞美道和“执大象”者（“大象”即大道）的质朴和低调。“道之出言，淡乎其无味：视之不可见，听之不可闻，用之不可既。”道和执道的人，很少豪言壮语高谈阔论，言辞淡而无味，你要看也看不到，你想听也听不见，但要用它（或他或她）的时候，却是取之不尽用之不竭。

三十六、柔胜刚。

此章历来有争议，因为这一章的内容，老子曾被韩非子指责为玩弄权术的人。这一章的正文我读了好多遍，总觉得上下内容缺乏逻辑。后来受到《我读老子》作者赵又春解读的启发，我调整了本章的英语译法。这是该章的全文：“将欲翕之，必固张之；将欲弱之，必固强之；将欲废之，必固举之；将欲取之，必固予之：是谓微明。柔胜刚，弱胜强。鱼不可脱于渊，国之利器不可以示人。”以“将欲翕之，必固张之”为例，好像前四字为“因”，后四字为“果”，就是说四句“将欲——必固”都是一种因果关系。但事实上，前四字是果，后四字是因，这样一下子逻辑全通了。老子说这是“微明”，一种微妙的策略。老子坚信“柔弱胜于刚强”（本章的主旨）是自然规律，最终一定是柔胜刚，弱胜强，鱼是离不开柔弱的水的，一个国家是不可用武器来示强的。

三十七、无欲以静，天下将自正。

第三十七章是《道德经》“道经”的最后一章。这一章的全文是：“道常，无名。侯王若能守之，万物将自化。化而欲作，吾将镇之以无名之朴。镇之以无名之朴，夫亦将无欲。无欲以静，天下将自正。”这一章不仅说了君王治国要守道，要以身作则，还说了“万物将自化”。百姓自化，化出问题来了怎么办？老子用君王的口吻作了回答：“化而欲作，吾将镇之以无名之朴。”这是在说，如果百姓有了违反道的欲望和行为，那么将用道（即“无名之朴”）来矫正他们。

三十八、上德不德，是以有德；下德不失德，是以无德。

这是“德经”第一章（全书第三十八章）的首句，老子对君王讲了四种德政，第一种是他推崇的道家的无为德政，第二种是仁政，第三种为义政，第四种是他最反对的礼政。“上德不德，是以有德”的意思是：具有上乘德行的君主从不显示自己的德行（或者从来不去“获得”），因此是真正有德的。“下德不失德，是以无德”，讲的是德行下等的君王从不失去显示自己有德的机会（或者从不失去“获得”的机会），因此是无德的。

三十九、贵以贱为本，高以下为基。

有史以来，君王为贵，百姓为贱，永远是君王在上，百姓在下，但君王再贵也必须以百姓为本，失了百姓这本，君王怎能称贵？君王何以居上？本章的争议在于它的首句“昔之得一者”，“得一”的“一”是什么意思？有注家说“一乃道”，有注家说“道生

一，一生二，一是道生的，因此‘一’不是道”。又有注家说那“一”指的是百姓。这种争论还可持续千百年，哪怕让老子再活过来，也说不清了，他会说“俺也记不得‘一’是啥意思了”。我的翻译是“与道同一”(be one with the Dao)。这样一来，下面的“天得一”、“地得一”、“神得一”、“谷得一”、“侯王得一”，全通了。

四十、反者道之动，弱者道之用。

第四十章只有两句话，但这恰恰又是最重要的一章，因为第一句强调了《道德经》最为核心的教义。“反者道之动”说的是，事物走向自己的反面是道的运动规律，具体地说便是“弱者道之用”，即由弱变强是道的独特功用。我的英文翻译着重体现了“反者道之动，弱者道之用”前后句“动”与“用”的关系：Reversion is the movement of the Dao, and moving from weakness is the functioning of the Dao.

四十一、下士闻道，大而笑之。不笑，不足以为道。

社会下层的人士，听人说道，会开怀大笑，笑老子在胡说八道。老子说，他们不笑，就不足为道了。我对美国大学生说道，他们脸上不笑，心里在笑，笑我在胡说八道，笑《道德经》违反了美国人恪守的许多价值，特别是那个“争”字。美国的政治、经济、文化、教育，社会的各行各业，讲的就是一个“争”字。争什么呢？争“强”，争第一，争做老大，争个你死我活。但老子叫你不要争，不要逞强，给你说弱克强的道理，还叫你少说、不说，叫你静叫你拙叫你守中，叫你打了胜仗要“恬淡为上，胜而不美”。在美国大学讲道是不是选错了地方？老子的“上士闻道，勤而行

之；中士闻道，若存若亡”是在讲2 500年的中国，对美国大学生来说，大多数是“下士闻道”，他们“大而笑之”是正常的，他们“不笑，不足以为道”。我以为我没有找错地方，美国的大学是讲道的最好地方，因为在美国讲道，千里寻“上士”，莫回首，回首大多是“下士”。但在美国大学，闻道下士固然多，若存若亡的“中士”（研究生）还是有的。在这里，我的任务是变“下士”为“中士”，变“中士”为“上士”，讲《道德经》将是我一生的大业。

四十二、道生一，一生二，二生三，三生万物。

许多人在读《道德经》之前，就知道“道生一，一生二，二生三，三生万物”这句名言了，而且多数把这句话读作老子的创世说，以为可以比肩上帝创世说和宇宙大爆炸理论。当然也有人以为老子说的一、二、三，是随意说的三个递进的数字，世上万物的出现就变得那么简单。我以为，老子并没有提出什么创世说。理解老子的“道生一，一生二，二生三，三生万物”这句话，应该与紧接着的“万物负阴而抱阳，冲气以为和”这句话联系起来读，这样合着一起读，就不难理解一、二、三的递进关系了。“道生一”说的是道的理念引出了一个混成一体的“有”的世界或宇宙；“二”指的是这个世界是由阴阳“二极”组成的；“三”便是阴阳二极加上阴阳互动而产生的“和合”能量。有了阴阳二极和二极互动产生的“和合”，这便有了世间万物。基于这种认识，就有了以上的英语翻译。

四十三、天下之至柔，驰骋天下之至坚。

天下最柔软的东西该是水了，水向下流的，不花力气，也

不费心思，可以穿梭于最坚硬的东西。基于老子的这一教导，我觉得水的管理或施政是一种最不花力气最不费心思又是成本最低的管理和施政。就在这一章，老子说了他“是以知无为之有益”，但遗憾的是，“不言之教，无为之益，天下希及之。”我看到中美两个大国最牛的商业和管理院校，提出过那么多管理理论、那么多成功或失败案例，但很少有谁讲老子关于水的管理和施政理念的。

四十四、知足不辱，知止不殆。

借这第四十四章，我来谈谈翻译的问题。解读、解释可以帮助翻译，无论是古文译成现代汉语还是把中文译成英文，但就翻译而言，是两种不同语言或者同一种语言的古今表达方式的转换，翻译就是翻译，翻译不是解读或解释，更不是演绎。精准地翻译一句句子，或一个单字，难点是对语境（context）的把握。比如“知足不辱”四字，难点是个“辱”字，辱一般指的是屈辱或羞辱，英文是 humiliation，但在“知足不辱”的语境下，译成 humiliation 就译错了，此处的意思是 insufficiency（亏缺、亏损、不足），即“知足者就不会感到不足了”，我译成了 A contented mind risks no loss。这一章总体来说不难解，但不好译。比如其首句“名与身孰亲？”有些注家以为“身”是身体或生命的意思，有些注家把“身”理解为一个人的德性和才能，这些注家都在作延伸解读，不是在翻译。我觉得老子的这个“身”就是“身”，身的英文就是 life 或者 human body，我选择译为 life，因为 life 倒译回中文是“身”、“生命”或“生活”的意思，整句英文是 Which is intimately closer to you, fame or life? 该章第二句是“身与货孰多”，“多”是“多少重要”的意

思，“货”是财物的意思，译文为 Which is more important to you, life or wealth? 难译的是之后的“甚爱必大费，多藏必厚亡。”“甚”和“多”都是“过度”的意思。问题是“甚爱”爱什么？“多藏”藏什么？由于要照顾前两句的语境，为了英语读者容易理解，必须要帮助一下，“甚爱”是爱名气，“多藏”是藏财物，因此英文译成了：Unchecked love of fame carries a high price. Excessive accumulation of wealth leads to more losses. 翻译就聊到这里，我们再回到“知足不辱，知止不殆”这八个字上去。人是一种贪婪的动物，知足、知止都不容易，多少生意人不知足，生意做到最后做得倾家荡产；多少官员不知止，做官最后把自己做进了牢房。老子告诫我们“知足不辱，知止不殆”，我们做不到，怪谁呢？怪道德缺失，怪智慧不够，怪制度不严，怪财运不济，怪官运如云……都可以怪，但我以为还是怪你没读《道德经》第四十四章。

四十五、大成若缺，其用不敝；大盈若盅，其用不穷。

老子说，一个集大成者，倘若自视欠缺，那么他的效用一定不会凋敝；一个饱学之士，倘若自视虚空，那么他的学养一定用之不竭。老子这话是对君王说的，但对所有人都有教育和启迪作用。

四十六、罪莫大于多欲，祸莫大于不知足。

这一章就上面摘引的警句而言是第四十四章思想的继续，文句简约扼要，无人不解。与第四十四章不同的是，这里老子把贪欲提到了罪孽和灾祸的高度，这与老子一以贯之的反战立场有关。本章的首句是：“天下有道，却走马以粪；天下无道，戎马生于郊。”老子深信，天下君王若“有道”，战争就不会发生了，因为

战争的目的总是起因于“多欲”和“不知足”。

四十七、不出于户，可以知天下；不窥于牖，可以知天道。

第四十七章也不长，文句浅显，不难理解，也不难翻译。上面摘引的两句意为：秀才不出门，能知天下事；不必依窗外望，也能把握住道的要义。我以为，老子在这一章讲了“重要义，不重细节”的认识论。在第六章，老子说“多闻数穷，不如守中”，他可能不太会赞许司马迁评屈原时所说的那种“博闻强志”的学习方法。我的理解是，对领导者（如君王）而言，重要义比重细节是一种更珍贵的素养，比如当今企业的CEO和COO的分工，应是前者把握要义后者注重细节。对老子而言，重要义就是重“道”，重“无为”，他要君王“不行而知，不见而明，不为而成”。

四十八、为学者日益，为道者日损。

我觉得这是第四十七章的续篇，继续在说“无为”的重要，以至“无为而无不为”。为学者知识一天一天地在增加，而为道者“有为的欲望”一天一天地在减少。老子似乎在说，不信道的“有为”学者，知识越多越“有为”，越“有为”就离“无为”越远，结果就成了“多闻数穷”，于世无益，于己也无益。

四十九、善者吾善之，不善者吾亦善之，得善。

第四十九章，我没有选首句，选了第二句。其实，选了第二句，就得读第三句，因为第二句讲“善”，第三句讲“信”（“信者吾信之，不信者吾亦信之，得信。”）这是典型的东方“善”“信”论（善对善，你不善，我也善待你，由此而得善；信对信，你无

信，我也信你，由此而得信)。西方不一样，西方是善对善、不善对不善；信对信、不信对不信。这一章老子赞美了得道的君王与民同心同德的鱼水关系，民是水，君是鱼。有了这种关系，才能“百姓皆注其耳目，圣人皆孩之”，即百姓就会成为君王的耳目，为执政而效劳，君王则视百姓为自己的衣食父母。

五十、出生入死。

出生入死，原先是表示生命的自然过程，不含价值取向，但后来变成了不顾生命安危的意思。我以为老子在说，生与死，都是生命的自然状态，也需自然地去对待，不要贪生怕死，贪生反而不得生，怕死反而死得早。老子设问：“何故？”回答是“以其生生之厚”(把生命看得过于厚重了)。死，一定要死得重于泰山吗？那是每个人自己的选择。我可能选择“轻如鸿毛”，那样死得轻松、浪漫，死得安乐。

五十一、生而不有，为而不恃，长而不宰。

有学者将这里的三句与林肯在著名的葛底斯堡演说中的三民主义（of the people, for the people, by the people）联系了起来，非常有创见。我原先很认同，现在我以为老子的“生而不有，为而不恃，长而不宰”是对轴心时代的君王所嘱，是“玄德”的核心价值。林肯讲的是民主制度的核心概括，老子讲的是“德政”的最高原则，同样是三句话，内涵是不一样的。老子的三句无主语，我以为主语可以是“道”，也可以是“君王”。假如说我花了太多的时日来翻译老子五千言，那么也可以说为了这十二个汉字，我花了十年，译成了现在这个样子（详见第五十一章的英译)。

五十二、天下有始，可以为天下母。

“天下有始”的“始”字如何译？“始”可以译为“开始”(beginning)，也可译为“始祖”(origin)，我再三斟酌，觉得在这一章的语境下，应该译为origin。天下的始祖是谁、是什么呢？老子没有直接说，但用了一个比喻：“母”。老子的许多注家替老子说那“母”就是“道”，但老子用的明明是个“母”字，没说“道”，汉译为何要译作“道”呢？我觉得汉语的“母”古今一样，不必译，汉语译成英文，译成mother是最为贴切的，因为这样才保留了老子的原意。另外说一下，这里出现了两个“天下”，第一个“天下”译成了the world，是集约的译法，第二个“天下”译成了all things and creatures，译成了“万事万物”，一个集约，一个具体，是考虑到了语境，就是说翻译不仅仅在字句选用上要予以最大程度上的关照，而且要做到言语内涵的精准呼应。

五十三、大道甚夷，而人好径。

老子在这一章批评了当时的君王离经叛道、朝政凋敝、作威作福的行径。我选了“大道甚夷，而人好径”这句今人依然在用的成语。大道宽广而平坦，但人就是不愿老老实实地去走正道，害了百姓，也坑了自己。

五十四、以身观身，以家观家，以乡观乡，以邦观邦，以天下观天下。

老子第五十四章的这句排比，读了就会让人想起《论语》的“修身齐家治国平天下”，但它们的内涵是不一样的。修身齐家治国平天下，其内涵是儒家的五常（仁、义、礼、智、信），而老

子讲的是道家的“道”和“德”。老子在说，看人就要看他（她）如何来遵道行德的，看一个家庭就要看每个家人如何来遵循实践“道德经”的，接着“以身观身，以家观家”，那么自然地，就有了“以乡观乡，以邦观邦，以天下观天下”。需要指出的是，道家与儒家并不是水火不容，而是互补的。有人把老学捧到了天上，要把儒学埋葬于十八层地狱，那是痴人说梦。

五十五、含德之厚者，比于赤子。

老子把得道者比作了呱呱坠地的婴孩，一种无私无欲但又充满了活力的生命原态。无私德厚，无欲则刚，婴孩“骨弱筋柔而握固，未知牝牡之合而朘作，精之至也；终日号而嗌不嗄，和之至也。”老子在说，婴孩筋骨最为柔弱，对牝牡之合漠然无知，然其精最为紧固，其气最为和顺，其神最为清澈。《老子》王弼传世本，在这五十五章的末尾，重复了第三十章的“物壮则老”一句（在我采用的由上海古籍出版社 1991 年出版的冯达甫先生的《老子译注》本中已被删除），更完整地强调了由弱至强、由强至老，由老至死的自然规律。老子以为，合乎、顺乎自然生命规律的，就是恰如“赤子”的“含德之厚者”。

五十六、知者不言，言者不知。

这是老子第五十六章的首句。“知者不言，言者不知”，其语义与今人用得更多的宋代苏洵所说的“知无不言，言无不尽”八字正好相反。所不同的是，老子的“知者不言，言者不知”是说给君王听的。老子在说，有知识、有智慧的君王，该惜字如金，不可信口开河，不可对下官和百姓乱发号令，那是有关社稷安危

的大事。

五十七、以正治国，以奇用兵，以无事取天下。

以正治国，正者，政也，法也，即依法治国。用兵与治国是两回事，兵不厌诈，打仗必须以奇取胜。老子的“无事取天下”，说的是，君王要让百姓太太平平地过他们的日子，不要无事找事，以折腾百姓为快事，这样才能取得天下百姓的真心拥戴。君王“无为、好静、无事、无欲”了，百姓就会“自化、自正、自富、自朴”。

五十八、祸兮，福之所倚；福兮，祸之所伏。

老子的这句生命箴言，我觉得始终在告诫我们，祸福一半在天，一半在人，老子说：“孰知其极？其无正！正复为奇，善复为妖。”意思是，没人知道祸福的最终界线在哪里，它们永远是无法确定的，正常突然成了不正常，善良一转身成了邪恶。老子说，圣人祈福避祸的方法是：“方而不割，廉而不刿，直而不肆，光而不耀。”我们不是圣人，一半老老实实做人，另一半只能听天由命了。

五十九、治人、事天莫若啬。

老子在这一章直接叮嘱君王“治人、事天”（治理国家、祭天拜祖），还不如注重农耕，以民生为大。事实上，老子五千言，多处批评昏庸君臣骄奢淫逸、作威作福的生活作风，以为那是有违自然乃至缺德的。在更宽泛的意义上，老子把农耕、民生看得比“治人、事天”还重要，提升到了“积德”和国家可以长治久安的

高度。“重积德则无不克，无不克则莫知其极；莫知其极可以有国，有国之母可以长久。”意思是，重视了积德，就可无攻不克；无攻不克，就可各种方略用之不竭；各种方略用之不竭，就可以道治国；以道治国，就可长治久安。

六十、治大国若烹小鳞。

这么多年来，我对第六十章的英译，惶恐至今，因为一直对老子用的“鬼”“神”二字的理解举棋不定。今天，我大约受了鬼神的相助，突然觉得茅塞顿开。这章的首句是“治大国若烹小鳞”。这句不难解释，意思是，治理一个国家恰如烹煮一条小鱼，必须小心翼翼，因为一不小心，那小鱼就可粉身碎骨。同样道理，一个国家的治理，稍有不慎，也会让天灾人祸殃及无辜的黎民百姓。顺着这个思路，老子接下来说了“以道莅天下”的重要性。以道治国，必有圣人住持，“鬼”“神”也会襄助。于是，难译的这部分也就跟着来了：“以道莅天下，其鬼不神。非其鬼不神，其神不伤人；非其神不伤人，圣人亦不伤人。夫两不相伤，故德交归焉。”“鬼”是什么呢？千百年来，国人都怕那个“鬼”字，半个世纪来，国人还天天嚷着要“打鬼”，殊不知老子在世的年代，“鬼”指的是死去的亲人和祖先，对死去的亲人和祖宗，后人送去的该是思念和祭奠，祈求的该是保佑和呵护。这正是老子的意思。老子说，圣人以道治国，亡故的祖先（“鬼”）是不会发神威予以阻挡的。老子紧接着说，不是祖先不发神威，是他们发的神威不会伤人。老子又补充说，不仅死去的祖先的神威不会伤人，而且以道治国的圣人也定不伤人，正因为“两不相伤”，他们正好合手把德行传授于后人和百姓了。老子连着叮嘱“不伤人”，因为只有

"不伤人"，像"烹小鳞"一样，小心翼翼，百般呵护，方得万民归顺，才能把一个国家治理好。

六十一、牝常以静胜牡，以静为其下。

老子第六十一章，我选了上句为警句，尽管该章说的是如何处理国际关系，特别是大国与小国的关系，但说的道理适合各种关系，包括大省与小省的关系，大公司与小企业的关系，富人与穷人的关系，家长与家人的关系，夫妻关系，朋友关系，兄弟姐妹关系，以至男人与女人的关系。五千言多有对"牝"与"牡"关系的评说，牝泛指雌性或雌性动物，牡泛指雄性或雄性动物。牝牡交媾，牝处下牡处上，牝静牡动，牝温静牡暴躁。上面的老子选句"牝常以静胜牡，以静为其下"说的是，雌性总是以"静"比牡性胜出一筹，处下优于处上，恰如江河上游，水急湍流，咆哮而下，合着两岸猿声啼不住。到了下游，一江静水，慢慢流淌，波光粼粼，悄然投入海洋的怀抱。老子以此来观照为各种欲望纠缠笼罩的人类社会，以为唯有"静"，唯有处下、不争，方得祥和、共生。我觉得，读懂了老子所论的牝牡关系，也就读懂了五千言，读懂了老子的君王论，读懂了"无为"的核心价值。无疑地，读懂了自然世界的牝牡关系，也就读懂了包括国家关系在内的各种关系为何要"处下"的道理。

六十二、人之不善，何弃之有？

老子论道，早于基督教五百年阐述了道对人性善恶的态度。基督教以为人有原罪，人一半是野兽，一半是天使，每个人都是善恶的统一体。正是在这个意义上，老子问："人之不善，何弃之

有？”（意思是，对不善之人，哪有遗弃的道理呢？）老子在这一章开句就讲了道与“善人”和“不善人”的关系：“道者，万物之奥，善人之宝，不善人之所保。”这句的意思是，道，主宰了万事万物，它不仅是善人的宝贝，也是不善人的保护伞。我以为，道是不善人的保护伞这句话，更让人感到其与儒学的区别，老子不谈仁义礼智信，也不谈以后出世的基督教的Evil，Justice，Love和Forgiveness这四大教义。我觉得，老子所谓道乃“不善人之所保”，是直接地、明白地在告诫君王，要懂得保护“不善人”，相信“正复为奇，善复为妖”“孰知其极？其无正！”是不能把人看死的。且问：千百年来，中外古今，有多少君王听到了或听懂了老子道的“不善人之所保”？

六十三、为无为，事无事，味无味。大小，多少，报怨以德。

老子第六十三章，千百年来，让无数注家竭尽训诂之能事，都成了把玩概念的行家，让我也玩了十年的英译，到前一晚还在竖来横去地遣词造句，第二天早上又把所造的句式推翻，改回到了最初的英文句式。老子告诫君王，要把“无为”处理成一种“为”，把“无事”处理成一种“事”，把“无味”处理成一种“味”。同样地，要把“事小”看作“事大”，把“事少”看成“事多”。说了这么多，老子最后把话落在了“报怨以德”，体现了道的博大胸怀。请教司马迁和汤因比：世上有多少君王能有这样的胸怀？

六十四、千里之行，始于足下。

现代汉语的四字、八字成语里，“千里之行，始于足下”常

用在我们的日常交流之中，因为常用，也就不去考究它的出处了。不读老子，就不会知道，这一句成语之前，另有两句含义几乎完全一样的句子：“合抱之木，生于毫末；九层之台，起于累土。”可见老子对“凡事皆有起始”的重视。这里有几层意思：第一，凡事皆有起始；第二，凡事开头难；第三，凡事要开个好头更难；第四，有始有终最难。老子在这章的后部还有这两句：“民之从事，常于几成而败之。慎终如始，则无败事。”意思是，人常常虎头蛇尾，难以善终。只有做到了善始善终，才无败事，才会成功。

六十五、古之善为道者，非以明民，将以愚之。

第六十五章的这一首句，让诸多注家觉得老子有愚民思想。但古语“愚”与现代汉语的“愚蠢”一词颇有区别。“愚”的原意指人常年野居，脑子简单，不谙人情世故。老子的道法自然，以朴为真，“愚”于此处不可解为现代意义上的“愚民”。“非以明民”，意思是“别去开发民智”，这里“智”指的是一种智巧，或指投机取巧的“智慧”，与“道”是格格不入的。正是在这个意义上，老子说：“故以智治国，国之贼；不以智治国，国之福。”

六十六、江海所以能为百谷王者，以其善下之。

这是第六十六章的首句，在这一章老子再次强调了道（或君王）的“处下”、“无争”、“谦恭”的核心价值。

六十七、天下皆谓我大，似不肖。

我选了这章开头的首句，加上后面跟的未引的两句，共三句，

说了古代明君的谦下。我把三句的英译倒译回汉语：天下人都说我伟大，我好像并不伟大。就是因为说我伟大，我反而不像了。如果真是伟大的话，那么事实上我一直是渺小的。一个君王倘若如此谦下，天下人一定会真心地说他伟大的。老子真是阅尽了人间的世故沧桑，君王谦下为王如此，凡人谦下做人，不也是这样的吗？

六十八、善为士者不武。

这一选句的意思是，一个好的士兵不会现示他的武力，这句的后面又跟了三句，让我把四句的原句和它们的英译都摘录于此："善为士者不武，善战者不怒，善胜敌者不与，善用人者为之下。"（A good soldier doesn't show his muscle. A good fighter doesn't get angry. A good commander doesn't praise himself for winning. A good leader puts himself below those he leads.）四句的意思是：一个好的士兵不会现示他的武力，一个善战的人不会发怒，一个善于胜敌的人不会赞誉自己的胜利，一个善于用人的人总把自己置于人之下。老子接着说："是谓不争之德，是谓用人之力，是谓配天之极。"意思是，这就是一种谦下不争的德行，一种用人的艺术，一种可以与天道比美的最高做人标准。

六十九、古之用兵者有言："吾不敢为主而为客，不敢进寸而退尺。"

老子在这一章讲了用兵之道，告诫君王"祸莫大于无敌"，他同时又说了"抗兵相若，哀者胜矣。"意思是两军势均力敌，最后胜利的定是"哀者"，所谓"哀兵必胜"。老子依然在讲，做君王的要处下、不争、广得民心。有了民心支持，无往而不胜。

七十、吾言甚易知，甚易行；而人莫之能知，莫之能行。

有注家说，这是老子最难理解的一章，可能言过其实了。我不是注家，更无功底作演绎。我在翻译，译家的天职是严复所教导的信、达、雅翻译三典，第一是忠实于原文，第二是通达易懂，第三是文句雅致。这一章的所谓难解之处就是本章首字“吾”和之下的三个“我”字，它们指老子自己呢，还是借用君王的口气。我以为这是注家的玩项，我只做翻译。确实，老子五千言通篇说“道”理都特别简单，不难“知”，去履行也容易，只要真心去实践。但往往简单易懂的“道”理，人是忽视的。我曾经写过一篇小文，题目是“无学之学，可为大学”，说的就是这个道理。没有学问的学问，谁会去做呢？其实人人都会做的学问，是最难做出新意来的，一旦做出，就是大学问了。《道德经》躺了 2 500 年，这么好的一块宝玉，有谁把它抱在怀里了呢？不是我等庸夫俗子，而是我们的祖圣。这一章的最后六个字“圣人被褐怀玉”：圣人（我们的先祖）穿的是麻布衣，怀里抱着的就是那块“玉”啊。

七十一、知不知，尚矣；不知知，病矣。

这一章的首句就十个字。全篇抄录于此：“知不知，尚矣；不知知，病矣。是以圣人不病，以其病病，夫唯病病，是以不病。”整篇的意思是：（一个君王）自知自己不知的东西，这是最好的知；自己不知但偏偏装作知道，这是脑子有病（恕我用了现代人常用的一句话）。圣人（明君者也）不犯这种毛病，就是因为讨厌这毛病。唯其讨厌这毛病，才不犯这病的。我们这些凡人，事实上不知装知的遍地皆是，特别是被人称为“大师”的“知者”，假

若也犯这种病，那是病入膏肓、无可救药了。

七十二、民不畏威，则大威至矣。

这是第七十二章的首句，它是告诫君王切忌官逼民反的另一种说法，这句的意思是：百姓什么都不怕了，那是最可怕的事了。这一章的下文译成白话文是："别让百姓定无居所，别毁了百姓的生路。你不去压迫百姓，百姓就不会造你的反。因此圣人（得道的君王）有自知之明，但不自吹自擂；自爱，但不把自己看得比百姓金贵。"老子的告诫早已被中外古今朝代更替的血腥历史印证了。

七十三、天网恢恢，疏而不失。

这是第七十三章的末句，一句运用至今的成语。这句成语常常用于如何处置坏人坏事，说的是，谁是坏人，谁做了坏事，迟早会落入恢恢之天网。可惜千百年来，成语的另一半意思被疏忽了，那就是上天眼睛盯着的不总是坏人，上天关照得更多的是好人，特别是那些遭到冤枉、暗算的好人，那些为恶势力视为眼中钉的斗士和英雄。天网的网眼相当宽疏，具有极大的包容性，永远会保护好人，会拯救和帮助那些被历史和现实伤害或抛弃的平民百姓。

七十四、民不畏死，奈何以死惧之？

这是该章的首句，也是用了千百年的一句成语。这本是老子用来告诫君王的，现在平民百姓常用来壮胆。老子五千言里多处用了"生""死"二字来论物说事，可见"终极关怀"的厉害。做

君王，做小民，都要活命，都要讨生活，谁不懂生死二字？但又有谁真正懂了？

七十五、民之饥，以其上食税之多，是以饥。

该章我也选了首句，读了这一句，想象老子的时代，与今相距 2 500 年，常让人感觉恍若昨日。老子说百姓发生饥荒，是因为他们的父母官（“其上”）吃掉了太多的税粮。老子“食税”二字用得极秒，是个双关，那时的赋税就是上交的粮食，因此当官的“食”了饥民太多的粮，也“食”了他们太多的税。老子以为，这是无“道”的，也是缺“德”的。

七十六、坚强处下，柔弱处上。

这是第七十六章的末句。“坚强处下”，这与君王要谦让处下的“处下”是两个不同的意思。“坚强处下”表示的是一种趋势，意思是，处在坚强鼎盛状态的事物，就一般生命发展规律而言，就是处在逐渐走“下”坡的位置了。这与老子第三十章所说的“物壮则老”是一个意思。同样道理，“柔弱处上”就一般生命发展趋势而言，就是处在了向上发展的生命阶段。

七十七、天之道，损有余而补不足。人之道则不然，损不足以奉有余。

读了老子第七十七章这两句话，感慨不已，没有人比老子把“人”这种高等动物看得更透彻的了。老子是不是在说，“人之道”不是“道”，“天之道”才是“道”？才是符合自然规律的真正的“道”？人类社会，从史前社会到奴隶社会，再到封建社会，再到资本主义社会，再到社会主义社会，所有这些社会，无一例外，

遵循的都是“人之道”，都是“损不足以奉有余”的。我们能不能把“人道主义”改成“天道主义”呢？

七十八、圣人云：受国之垢，是谓社稷主；受国之不祥，是谓天下王。

老子的这句话，让我真正懂得了什么是一个领袖的担当：能承受一个国家的耻辱和灾难的才是真正守道的君王。中国历史上出现的有担当的明君，远古有舜、尧、大禹、商汤，汉朝有汉武帝，唐朝有唐太宗李世民；有担当的贤相，随手可以举出李斯、萧何、诸葛亮、王安石。美国最伟大最有担当的总统中，有独立战争结束后 1789 年当选为第一任总统的华盛顿，连任两届后放弃所有权力，开创了民主政治的先河；1860 年就任第 16 任总统的林肯，举旗引领废除农奴制度，南北战争结束后提出三民主义，把民主政治提到了一个新的高度；1933 年就任第 32 任总统的罗斯福，一个腰部之下全瘫痪终年坐轮椅的残疾人，带领美国度过了史无前例的经济大萧条，直到珍珠港事件后正式介入太平洋战争，为结束二次世界大战起了决定性的作用。罗斯福是美国唯一连任超过两届（实际做了四届）、最后死在位上的总统。

七十九、天道无亲，常与善人。

这是这一章的最后一句，不好理解的是，前四字与后四字的逻辑关系。“天道无亲”，天道，即道，道对天下的万事万物，对善人和不善人，一视同仁，无亲无疏。既然无亲无疏一视同仁，怎么又说“常与善人”呢？为什么“总是对善人多点帮助”呢？其实，不是上天偏心善人，而是善人，唯其善，才得道多助的。这是人人都知道的道理，做君王也好，做平民百姓也好，都得做

人，做人无争、处下、善良，这人不是更好做些、做得更轻松些吗？因此，天道无亲，常与善人，千真万确。

八十、小国寡民，使有什伯之器而不用，使民重死而远徙。

这第八十章也多有争议，争议首先在这章的首句，有多家不同的解释和演绎。有的认为“小国寡民”是当时的一种社会状态，有的说“小国寡民”代表了老子的一种朴素的社会思想，希望“让国家小一点，让人口少一点”。在当时生活资料相对匮乏的自然社会状态下，无疑地，国家小一点，管理就容易点；人口少一些，养活也更容易些。因此君王要教导人民重视生命，不要无端迁徙远行，要他们“甘其食，美其服，乐其俗，安其居”。当老子写下“邻国相望，鸡犬之声相闻，民至老死不相往来”的时候，他怎么能想象得到2 500年后互联网时代的人的生存状态和在大规模杀伤武器笼罩下的国际关系。

八十一、信言不美，美言不信。

老子第八十一章，可以说是对五千言的一个概括，说得更精准些，就是对“德经”四十四章要义的再次肯定，大致说了二层意思：一层是教导君王如何识人，就是如何看人的言行和秉性；另一层说了“利而不害”的“天之道”和“为而不争”的“圣人之道”，其实二道即一道，圣人之道就是天之道。选句“信言不美，美言不信”，意思是，可信的话不华美，华美的话不可信。首句接下来的两句在解释上有分歧：“知者不博，博者不知。善者不多，多者不善。”前一句，注家争论“知”好还是“博”好，我以为“知者不博，博者不知”所要表示的是，知者不会去吹嘘自己

的知识，那些总是卖弄自己知识的恰恰是没有真知灼见的人。后一句争议更大些："善者不多，多者不善。"我原先把"善者"理解为"善良的人"，这样的解读造成了对"不多"二字理解的困难：善良的人什么"不多"呢？财富？报酬？敌人？都可以这么猜度，但可能都不是老子的原意。读老子，就这些地方难读。作为译者，这样的猜度永远是危险的。最谨慎的方法可能要从全段、全篇的语境中去把握。第八十一章首段是"信言不美，美言不信。知者不博，博者不知。善者不多，多者不善。"前两句讲的是"言语"和"知识"，那么合乎逻辑地来推断，第三句讲的该是与"言""知"有关的"行"了。这是我现在的理解。因此我译成了"He who is able is not good at all things; he who is good at everything is not able."倒译回去的意思是，一个有才干的人（善于处事和阅人）不会样样都行，一个样样都行的人（可能样样都不行）不一定是真有才干的。顺便说一句，句中用的 good at，英文中就是"善于"的意思。

（居延安，2018 年 3 月 27 日，6 月 17 日改；

2019 年 4 月 8 日再改）

图书在版编目（CIP）数据

道德经：汉英对照 /（春秋）老子著；居延安翻译、
编注. — 上海：上海译文出版社，2019.8
（世界学术经典系列）
ISBN 978-7-5327-8041-9

Ⅰ.①道… Ⅱ.①老… ②居… Ⅲ.①道家 ②《道德
经》—汉、英 Ⅳ.①B223.1

中国版本图书馆CIP数据核字（2019）第099501号

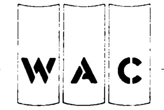
老子
Dao De Jing (Tao Te Ching)

道德经（汉英对照版）
老子　著　居延安　翻译　编注
责任编辑 / 陆亚平　装帧设计 / 张志全工作室

上海译文出版社有限公司出版、发行
网址：www.yiwen.com.cn
200001　上海福建中路 193 号
江阴金马印刷有限公司印刷

开本 890 × 1240　1/32　印张 7.25　插页 6　字数 202,000
2019 年 8 月第 1 版　2019 年 8 月第 1 次印刷
印数：0,001-3,000 册

ISBN 978-7-5327-8041-9/B · 462
定价：78.00 元



World Academic Classics
世界学术经典·英文版

Marxism
马克思主义

The Communist Manifesto (Marx & Engels)
共产党宣言（马克思、恩格斯）

Chinese Classics
中国经典

论语（汉英对照）
Confucius' Analects

道德经（汉英对照）
Dao De Jing

孟子（汉英对照）
Mencius

庄子（汉英对照）
Zhuangzi

孙子兵法（汉英对照）
Sun Tzu on the Art of War

大学、中庸（汉英对照）
The Way of Learning and The Way to Harmony

Philosophy
哲　学

Republic (Plato)
理想国（柏拉图）

Metaphysics (Aristotle)
形而上学（亚里士多德）

Meditations on First Philosophy (René Descartes)
第一哲学沉思录（笛卡尔）

A Discourse on Method (René Descartes)
方法论（笛卡尔）

Pascal's Pensées (Blaise Pascal)
思想录（帕斯卡尔）

A Treatise of Human Nature (David Hume)
人性论（休谟）

Critique of Pure Reason (Kant)
纯粹理性批判（康德）

Critique of Judgement (Kant)
判断力批判（康德）

The Phenomenology of Mind (Hegel)
精神现象学（黑格尔）

The Logic of Hegel (Hegel)
小逻辑（黑格尔）

The World as Will and Representation (Schopenhauer)
作为意志与表象的世界（叔本华）

Thus Spake Zarathustra (Nietzsche)
查拉图斯特拉如是说（尼采）

Either / Or (Kierkegaard)
非此即彼（克尔凯郭尔）

Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology (Husserl)
纯粹现象学导论（胡塞尔）

On First Philosophy (Husserl)
论第一哲学（胡塞尔）

Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus (Wittgenstein)
逻辑哲学论（维特根斯坦）

Philosophical Investigations (Wittgenstein)
哲学研究（维特根斯坦）

Pragmatism (William James)
实用主义（威廉·詹姆斯）

Reconstruction in Philosophy (John Dewey)
哲学的改造（杜威）

Time and Free Will (Henri Bergson)
时间与自由意志（伯格森）

A Discourse on the Positive Spirit (Auguste Comte)
论实证精神（孔德）

Novum Organum (Francis Bacon)
新工具（培根）

Ethics
伦理学

The Nicomachean Ethics of Aristotle (Aristotle)
尼各马可伦理学（亚里士多德）

The Theory of Moral Sentiments (Adam Smith)
道德情操论（亚当·斯密）

A Discourse on Inequality (Rousseau)
论人类不平等的起源与基础（卢梭）

Critique of Practical Reason (Kant)
实践理性批判（康德）

Utilitarianism (Mill)
功利主义（密尔）

Principia Ethica (Moore)
伦理学原理（摩尔）

Religion
宗教学

Confessions (St. Augustine)
忏悔录（圣·奥古斯丁）

Basic Writings of Saint Thomas Aquinas (Thomas Aquinas)
圣托马斯基本著作（阿奎那）

Basic Theological Writings (Martin Luther)
路德基本著作选（马丁·路德）

The Courage to Be (Paul Tillich)
存在的勇气（蒂利希）

The Essence of Christianity (Ludwig Feuerbach)
基督教的本质（费尔巴哈）

Politics
政治学

The Politics of Aristotle (Aristotle)
政治学（亚里士多德）

The Prince (Machiavelli)
君主论（马基雅维利）

The Social Contract (Rousseau)
社会契约论（卢梭）

Leviathan (Thomas Hobbes)
利维坦（霍布斯）

Two Treatises of Government (John Locke)
政府论（洛克）

The Spirit of the Laws (Montesquieu)
论法的精神（孟德斯鸠）

Democracy in America (Tocqueville)
论美国民主（托克维尔）

Considerations on Representative Government (Mill)
代议制政府（密尔）

The Federalist Papers (Hamilton)
联邦党人文集（汉密尔顿）

The Ancien Régime and the Revolution (Tocqueville)
旧制度与大革命（托克维尔）

Utopia (Thomas More)
乌托邦（莫尔）

On Liberty (Mill)
论自由（密尔）

Reflections on the Revolution in France (Edmund Burke)
法国革命论（伯克）

The Will to Power (Nietzsche)
权力意志（尼采）

On War (Carl von Clausewitz)
战争论（克劳塞维茨）

Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution (Pyotr Alexeyevich Kropotkin)
互助论（克鲁泡特金）

Economics
经济学

The Economics of Welfare (Pigou)
福利经济学（庇古）

Principles of Economics (Alfred Marshall)
经济学原理（马歇尔）

The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money (Keynes)
就业、利息与货币通论（凯恩斯）

Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy (Schumpeter)
资本主义、社会主义与民主（熊彼特）

The Theory of Economic Development (Schumpeter)
经济发展理论（熊彼特）

An Essay on Population (Thomas Robert Malthus)
人口原理（马尔萨斯）

An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations (Adam Smith)
国民财富的性质和原因的研究（亚当・斯密）

The Principles of Scientific Management (Frederick Winslow Taylor)
科学管理原理（泰勒）

Sociology
社会学

Suicide: A Study in Sociology (Durkheim)
自杀：社会学研究（迪尔凯姆）

Ideology and Utopia (Mannheim)
意识形态与乌托邦（曼海姆）

The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism (Max Weber)
新教伦理与资本主义精神（韦伯）

First Principles (Herbert Spencer)
基本原理（斯宾塞）

The Philosophy of Money (Georg Simmel)
货币哲学（西美尔）

The Theory of Leisure Class (Thorstein B. Veblen)
论闲逸阶级（凡勃伦）

A Treatise on General Sociology (Vilfredo Pareto)
社会学总论（帕累托）

Anthropology
人类学

The Golden Bough (Frazer)
金枝（弗雷泽）

Race, Language and Culture (Franz Boas)
种族・语言・文化（鲍斯）

Argonauts of the Western Pacific (Malinowski)
西太平洋的航海者（马林诺夫斯基）

The Savage Mind (Claude Lévi-Strauss)
野性思维（列维-斯特劳斯）

Structure and Function in Primitive Society (Redcliffe-Brown)
原始社会的结构和功能（拉迪克利夫-布朗）

Psychology
心理学

The Principles of Psychology (William James)
心理学原理（威廉・詹姆斯）

The Interpretation of Dreams (Sigmund Freud)
梦的解析（弗洛伊德）

Principles of Physiological Psychology (Wundt)
生理心理学原理（冯特）

The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious (Jung)
原型与集体无意识（荣格）

Law
法　学

Ancient Law (Maine)
古代法（梅因）

Lectures on Jurisprudence (Austin)
法理学演讲录（奥斯丁）

English Law and the Renaissance (Maitland)
英国法律与文艺复兴（梅特兰）

Fundamental Principles of the Sociology of Law (Ehrlich)
法律社会学基本原理（埃利希）

History
历史学

The Histories (Herodotus)
历史（希罗多德）

The Peloponnesian War (Thucydides)
伯罗奔尼撒战争史（修昔底德）

The Annals of Imperial Rome (Tacitus)
编年史（塔西佗）

The City of God (St. Augustine)
上帝之城（圣·奥古斯丁）

On Heroes, Hero Worship, and the Heroic in History (Thomas Carlyle)
论历史上的英雄、英雄崇拜和英雄业绩（卡莱尔）

The Idea of History (Collingwood)
历史的观念（科林伍德）

History of Civilization in Europe (Francois Guizot)
欧洲文明史（基佐）

The Influence of Sea Power (Alfred T. Mahan)
海权对历史的影响（马汉）

Theory & History of Historiography (Benedetto Croce)
史学理论与史学史（克罗齐）

A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies (Bartolomé de las Cases)
西印度毁灭述略（卡萨斯）

Literary Theory and Aesthetics
文学理论与美学

On the Art of Poetry (Aristotle)
诗学（亚里士多德）

On the Art of Poetry (Horace)
诗艺（贺拉斯）

On the Sublime (Longinus)
论崇高（朗吉努斯）

Theory of Aesthetic / History of Aesthetic (Benedetto Croce)
美学理论 / 美学史（克罗齐）

Hegel's Aesthetics Lectures on Fine Art (Hegel)
黑格尔美学讲演录（黑格尔）

The Birth of Tragedy (Nietzsche)
悲剧的诞生（尼采）

Linguistics
语言学

Course in General Linguistics (Saussure)
普通语言学教程（索绪尔）

On Language (Wilhelm Humboldt)
论语言（威廉·洪堡特）

Scientific Philosophy
自然科学哲学

On the Origin of Species (Charles Darwin)
物种起源（达尔文）

Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy and Its System of the World (Issac Newton)
自然哲学及其宇宙体系的数学原理（牛顿）

Natural History (Pliny the Elder)
自然史（老普林尼）



World Academic Classics

世界学术经典

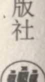
英文版

道德经

老子 著

居延安 翻译 编注

上海译文出版社





上海译文公众号

上海译文出版社

www.yiwen.com.cn

上架建议：世界学术经典

ISBN 978-7-5327-8041-9



定价：78.00元